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HOURS
OF
COMMUNION



HOURS OF COMMUNION.

HOURS OF COMMUNION

IN A

SEASON OF AFFLICTION:

BEING

MEDITATIONS

ON

SCRIPTURE SUBJECTS.

BY

NEIL SMITH, JUN.,

ABERDEEN.

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PRINTED AT THE FREE PRESS OFFICE,
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TO THE
PASTOR AND OFFICE-BEARERS
OF
The High Free Church.

DEAR BRETHREN,

In dedicating my little book to you, I believe you will give me credit for the act, not as a begging of patronage, but as affording me an opportunity of expressing my sincere respect for you all.

And at the same time it affords me the opportunity of acknowledging with much gratitude to God, that our intercourse in connection with the affairs of the Congregation has been of the kindest and most Christian character.

It must be to us all, and specially to our true and common friend the Pastor, a matter for real gratitude to God, that the affairs of the Congregation are of so truly a satisfactory character, as in the kindness of God is the real state of matters among us. We are not insensible to the fact of the many shortcomings of all, and that the pure eye which cannot look upon sin, must see much unobserved by us to vex His Holy Spirit; and thus, while we are truly called to humiliation and contrition before God, we must not overlook, or lightly esteem the tokens of His grace and favour which we do enjoy.

I am,

DEAR BRETHREN,

Your sincere friend and brother in the Lord,

A FELLOW-ELDER.

ABERDEEN, *September, 1871.*

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PREFACE.

THE author of the following pages feels that his reason for writing and then for printing them, is truly a matter in which few will feel any interest at all. He is quite aware of the plethora of books on every conceivable subject, which now make the press to groan, and leave even the reading public gasping for breath.

His pages were written in a time of enforced inaction, through the hand of God "laying affliction upon his loins." But to the glory of the mercy and loving-kindness of his heavenly father, "Christ's Father and our Father, Christ's God and our God," he has to acknowledge that the season of affliction was a time of love. The writing of these pages made many an hour pass pleasantly, which would have otherwise passed heavily; and he has learned by experience, that God hath set one thing over against another, and that while he has chosen for his child, what the child would not have chosen for himself, He hath manifested both His wisdom and His grace, by a result which shall redound to His glory and to the good of His redeemed child for ever. Oh, it is well for us, that we are not in our own keeping nor at our own

disposal; well for us that we are under the eye that never sleeps, and under the hand which infinite wisdom guides, and which infinite grace directs; the hand which guides and upholds the universe, sustaining angels in their seats of glory, and saints in their seats of bliss.

How these pages were written I have already said. It would be more difficult to answer why they are printed. Let me say, however, that I trust the predominating reason is a hearty desire that it may please God to bless even so feeble and unworthy an instrument, to be of some spiritual advantage to some equally weak, though not perhaps to some equally unworthy a brother. There are Goliaths in the spiritual as well as in the natural or physical world, but for one giant with sword and spear, there are many who can handle only the sling and stone; perhaps the latter designation is too pretentious for the little volume now offered to the public.

If the author knows anything of his own heart, the gratification of knowing that the Lord had blessed the volume to the spiritual good of any poor brother whatever, would afford the only kind of satisfaction for which he is anxious, and for which he humbly acknowledges a craving of heart. Will the reader kindly offer a single supplication for God's favour in the direction indicated, and so lay the author under a debt of grateful obligation?

SEPTEMBER, 1871.

BETHANY.

BETHANY

THE TOWN OF MARY AND HER SISTER MARTHA.

"Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha."—John xi. 1.

THIS world of which most men are so enamoured is called in Scripture "this present evil world," and the way to overcome it, is to live under the "powers of the world to come." These powers are so transcendently important, that when brought home to the heart by the Holy Ghost, they are able to subjugate the world which now is present with us. We shall carry with us many of the remembrances of this world into that world to come. The actions of this life determine the complexion of that life to come, and the remembrance of them must go with us to justify the awards on which we enter there. But places will have their place in remembrance there as well as deeds. Indeed, it is the idea of some, that this very earth, purged of all its evils, and made anew, will be the future habitation of the redeemed; but while plausible reasons may be assigned for this idea, we do not regard them as at all conclusive, but open to objections of a character weightier than the reasons

assigned. We do not discuss the question ; let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

Meanwhile we say, that there are places on this earth the remembrance of which will never die from the memory either of angels or of men. Who will ever forget Bethlehem, and the manger where the infant Redeemer was laid—where the Ancient of days was first manifested in the flesh ? Who will ever forget Nazareth, where, notwithstanding its evil report, He was brought up whom no man could convict of sin ? Or Jerusalem, where the Tribes went up unto the “ testimony of Israel,” the city where David dwelt, the city, above all, where David’s Son and David’s Lord wore the crown of thorns, and died the accursed death upon the tree ? But Bethany also has its memories which shall never die. It was the scene of much loving intercourse between the loving Man of Sorrows and hearts which were knit to Him by the tenderest ties which bind human heart to human heart. The homeless man could always find a home there, and hearts that felt honoured and blessed in ministering to Him. There, at least, He could always count on a loving welcome and cheerful service. Besides which, it was to Bethany He led out His disciples, and from thence He was parted from them, the earthly intercourse coming there to a close, and from thence He was carried up into heaven.

Yet in that family, than which, perhaps, none ever shared more fully in the friendship of the man Christ Jesus, there is sickness, and evidently sore sickness nigh unto death. The head of the orphan family, the brother, who is the very light of the eyes of the two

sisters, is sick; and in that little household there is deep heart-trouble—Lazarus was sick—“Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.” Sickness and death invade all the dwellings of our fallen race, none are exempt—not even those of the brethren of Christ, for whom He hath prepared mansions where trouble, sickness, and death can never enter. Yet the Lord, who will not avert the sickness, nor the death, will make these and all things else work together for good to them that love Him.

VERSE 2. “It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.” Of the Mary of Bethany, the evangelist interposes, by anticipation, her anointing of the Lord’s feet with precious balsam, and the wiping of them with the hairs of her head. The incident is embalmed in the Word of the Lord, and wheresoever the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached throughout the whole world, there shall that which she did be spoken of for a memorial of her—blessed deed, and how richly recompensed. Let us not forget that inasmuch as we have done anything to the least of Christ’s brethren, He is pleased to acknowledge it as done unto Him.

We do not think that there is almost any room to doubt that this is the second instance of the same token of affection and respect which was paid to the person of Jesus. The first by the woman which had been a sinner, but having had much forgiven loved much: the second by her who, though blameless in her life before men, yet felt that she needed a better righteousness than her own in the sight of God, and

found that righteousness in the man Christ Jesus. Precious balm, very costly, was in both instances the offering, but the widow's mite was equally acceptable to the Lord; and so is the cup of cold water to a disciple when that is all that is in the power of the hand to offer. He is no exacting master whom we serve, but who, as a father pitieth his children, pities those who fear and serve Him.

VERSE 3. "Therefore his sisters sent unto Him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick." The sisters sent to the Lord the message, "Behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick;" no doubt they had seen something, and had heard more of His power to heal, and of His affection they had no doubt. There is no importunity in the message, it is enough if He, who is to them both Lord and friend, knows that they are in trouble and sorrow, they can trust Him for the rest. They are sure His heart will be with them, and they are confident in His power and willingness to help them in behalf of him of whom they were well assured that the Lord Himself loved him. How comforting and assuring to friends when they can carry a sick relative in the arms of their faith to a throne of grace, saying, "Lord, behold, he (or she) whom Thou lovest is sick?" What assurance is hereby conveyed to the heart of the suppliant that his prayer will not fall to the ground, that it will be heard, and in the best of all times and ways answered also. How important that men should so live that, when affliction comes, as sooner or later it comes to all, the message may be sent to Jesus, "Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick." But unless we love Jesus, if we are indifferent

to His love, and to all which that love has accomplished for His people, such a message would be mockery and insult. It is true that He is ever first in the matter of loving, but then where His love has been neglected and despised, and hath begotten no love in return ; where the life hath been spent as if there were no God to call men into judgment, or as if Christ had never come to reveal the Father, and to open a way of access for sinners to return to God, who could carry such an one to Jesus as one loved of Him ; the tongue would cleave to the roof of the mouth in such an attempt. Blessed be His name that, notwithstanding all this, we are not shut out from the merciful One ; we may still carry even such a sinner as this to the throne of grace, as a sinner ready to perish, beseeching the interposition of the spirit of Christ, that even he may become a trophy of Divine grace in a day of Divine power.


VERSE 4. "When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." The message of the sorrowing sisters duly reaches the much trusted friend, and it would appear, too, reaches in time to avert the catastrophe. And it would almost look as if He had done or would do it—"This sickness is not unto death." To death, considered as the final exit of man from this world, and his entrance upon changeless eternity ; considered as the dissolution of his connexion with time, this sickness was not unto death. Yet to the apprehension of men, and so far as human power was concerned, Lazarus did die a real death, followed by a real resurrection—a resur-

rection "for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." Here is one of the many proofs of the Divine nature of Christ; incidental, indeed, but not the less conclusive. The proofs, of this all important doctrine are so many, both of a direct and indirect character, that one wonders how it is possible to read the Bible and miss it; it is the very corner-stone of the doctrine of atonement, and the only principle of reconciliation between the justice of God and the safety of the sinner. The form of the language used here by Christ implies an identity and equality, and an intercommunication of glory between the Father and the Son. It is a form of words to which there is nothing like in all the Scriptures, as marking the relation subsisting between God and any of His other servants of whatever nature or degree. The words are of parallel import, and equivalent to that used by our Lord in the marvellous prayer recorded by this same evangelist, "Father, glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee." It is a common glory and a common interest, for "he that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father who sent Him."

VERSE 5. "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." There is more honour conferred on the family at Bethany by the few simple words here recorded, than could have been conferred by the united friendship of all the rulers of this world. If the Christian dared to envy any thing, he would envy such a record as this. And yet wherefore should he? Is it not as true of every member of the body of Christ, that the Lord loves him as that He did Martha,

and her sister, and Lazarus ? And is it not true of this matter of Christ's love to His people, as it was true in respect to the fact of His resurrection—"Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed?" If we were as sure of our love to Jesus as were the brother and sisters of Bethany, we might rest as assured as they were of His love to us. It is true they had the advantage of personal communication, which to creatures like us, so dependent on sensible objects, and to whom abstract thought of any kind, and especially the mind's observation, and judging of its own operations, is a work of great subtlety and difficulty, was no small advantage; yet if we are able with any good measure of assurance to say, that "Him having not seen we love," there may be a greater and a greater purity in this love, exercised, as it is, under circumstances more difficult than had it been the result of personal communication, and, perhaps, in some degree dependent on it. We know that our knowledge after the flesh ceases with our connection with this world, yea, even had we known Christ after the flesh, it would have been a knowledge to be done away, and we should have had to say, like the apostle, "Yet henceforth know we Him (so) no more." We are then much nearer upon an equal ground of privilege with those who saw Christ in the flesh than we have sometimes been disposed to believe. Let us never forget the privilege of the other Comforter who is to abide with the Church all the time of its wilderness sojourning, and who is to the Church scattered abroad over all the earth what the personal presence of the Man Christ Jesus could not have been.

VERSE 6. "When He had heard therefore that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was." Knowing the love which subsisted between the afflicted family and the Lord, we should have expected what, no doubt the sisters did expect, an immediate compliance with what He well knew was the object of the message—help. We know where the Lord was when the message reached Him—certainly not at Jerusalem, where a message would have reached in an hour from Bethany, a distance of only about two miles, and whence an hour's walk would have brought Him thither, but at or about Bethabara beyond Jordon, where John at first baptized. Is this then, Jesus, Thou loving and much loved one, "is this Thy kindness to Thy friend?" He was eagerly expected; anxiously longed for; and He knew it, and notwithstanding He abides two days still in the same place where He was. But He will be justified in the eyes, and in the hearts also, of those to whom His absence at such a time is a great aggravation of their sorrow. "Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord, His going forth is prepared as the morning, and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain, unto the earth;" and even as the sisters at Bethany realized the truth of this very soon, so sooner or later, but not very long at the farthest, shall all His people. How many are always in this sin-troubled world, the habitations where the coal which was left has been quenched, and where he, or she, who is left solitary, bereft of the light of the eyes, after many prayers and many a longing look for an answer of peace, has



had to give up the loved object in faith of reunion in the sinless, deathless land, where all the friends of Jesus are sure to meet again ; and now faith and hope are directed to that land of blessed hope, and the coming of the Lord to "set the solitary in families" is regarded, not with dread, but with expectation and chastened submissive desire.

The stroke seemed heavy, and was felt to be heavy, but faith was able to pierce the cloud and see the hand of "the living One who was dead but is alive for evermore, and who holds the keys of death and of the invisible world." The present world lost much of its power, and the powers of the world to come grew in strength and influence ; so that even now the smitten believing one knows in a measure the reason and meaning of the Lord's dealing with him, and believes that he shall know yet more hereafter. Meantime, however trying the stroke may be, and however seeming desolating in its effects, he knows that it came from the hand of Him who would not do him wrong, and with whom inadvertence or mistake have no place. When, in regard to the loved one, there is good ground for the hope that is full of immortality, how is the survivor cheered by the assurance that he or she is lost only to sight, and that only for a little while, and is gone to the great and happy gathering place of the children of God, gathered from all time and space on earth—a gathering to which every generation of time and every region of the earth will have contributed its brightest and its best, and there they shine brighter still, and the holy are holier still—who would dare to complain of a result like this in regard

1

to any loved one, and the greater the love the farther from all complaining, notwithstanding the deeper sense and feeling of our loss? Jesus told His disciples that if they loved Him they would rejoice because He was about to return to the Father, and the same principle applies in degree to all Christ's brethren, when the voice from heaven has reached them, "come up hither." It was to one heaven that Jesus was returning, and that His people go. It is true that the Father's house has many mansions, but together they constitute the one Father's one house, and the Son is among them as the first-born among the many brethren who constitute the one family of God. And surely if it was true on earth that he who saw the Son saw the Father, it will not be less true in heaven.

VERSES 7, 8. "Then after that saith He to His disciples, Let us go into Judea again. His disciples say unto Him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone Thee; and goest Thou thither again?" When last in Judea, Jesus had been compelled to exemplify in His own conduct the maxim which He had delivered to His disciples, "when they persecute you in one city flee ye into another," and that not for the purpose of escaping death, for He came into the world very mainly for the purpose of dying, a baptism of blood which he was even straitened till it should be accomplished. But all things that were written concerning Him were not yet fulfilled, and He would not anticipate by an iota aught of the Father's will concerning Him. Besides, it was not fitting that He who came both in life and in death to fulfil all righteousness should die at the hands of an unthinking infuri-

ated mob. He must die by a judicial sentence, yet acquitted of all guilt by the very judge who condemned Him. It would have been well had His example as well as His precept been followed herein by many of His devoted and right-hearted followers, who braved death that might have been innocently escaped, almost offering up an unbidden sacrifice on the altar of God—a sacrifice doubtless accepted by Him who looks to motives rather than to deeds, though it might have been at least postponed, and God all the more glorified thereby. We at least may gently deal with such a sacrifice, we to whom the lines have fallen in so much more pleasant places, and whose sacrifices are not of blood but of praise and thanksgiving.

There are no doubt occasions when every sacrifice must be dared for the glory of God and a good conscience. Nehemiah was placed in such circumstances when the enemies of the Jews attempted by varied wiles to bring him into fear and into a course of action which might have been easily turned to his prejudice; “and I said, should such a man as I flee? and who is there that being as I am would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.” The result justified Nehemiah, and how much more did the event justify Jesus on all those occasions when He delivered Himself out of the hands of those who sought His life before His hour was fully come? Though Jesus was about to act as if He had forgotten what happened when He was last in Judea, His disciples had not forgotten, and though doubtless their anxiety and fear were more for Him than for themselves, they were not insensible to the danger which threatened them-

selves. They are willing to run all risks with Him, but they would willingly avoid the danger if they could prevail with Him to do so also, and had there not been sufficient cause they were right; their fault lay not so much in fearing the violence of ungodly men as in distrusting the wisdom and prudence of Him whose wisdom and whose kindness to and care for them they had such strong cause to trust. But He knoweth our frame and remembers that we are but dust, and when He knows (as in every such case He does know) that the spirit is willing though the flesh be weak, He can both pity and forgive and renew the strength of the weakest of His brethren.

VERSES 9, 10. "Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him." The answer which Jesus makes to the objection urged by His disciples, is an answer drawn from sensible objects, and sensible principles, applied to moral objects and moral principles. Walking in the light of day, though the path may be unequal and difficult, with danger on either side, yet while daylight lasts the man walks securely and in comfort, his only fear is that he may be overtaken by the coming night ere he reach a place of safety. And even so duty may call a man into a course of action which he would not willingly have chosen for himself, but the duty, if to him it is plain and imperative, makes to him the moral day light, and if persuaded that he is following the call of God, he as little stumbles in his path as the man who sees the

light of this world, and therefore goes on his way with confidence. The application of this principle would have effectually prevented all will-worship, ascetism, and self-inflicted penances; we should have had neither monks nor nuns, and we should never have heard of works of supererogation, a superfluity of human merit to come into competition with the merit of Christ. But while the principle condemns all self-inflicted, and man-imposed penances, it justifies and magnifies the real martyrs of Jesus Christ, the men who loved not their lives unto the death, when life could not be preserved but at the expense of a good conscience. Life was not given to be thrown away, or to be lightly regarded; it is a precious deposit bestowed by the Lord and Giver of life—a deposit for which interest will be looked, and interest required by the God of the spirits of all flesh. We may hold it lightly, but it will have to be seriously accounted for. Occupy till I come is the charge laid upon every son of man, and Christ showed His sense and feeling of the weight and responsibility of the charge when He said, “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work;” and not by word only, but in word and deed He was ever about His Father’s business. It is true that no man ever laid down his life so willingly as He did, but He did not throw it away—it was yielded up a God-glorifying and a God-accepted sacrifice. Life was not forced from Him, but was freely yielded—yet not till all that was written of Him was fulfilled, and then only when the very end of His coming into the world, then only, if sinners of men were to be saved, He

must die, then only He bowed His head and gave up His spirit to the Father who sent Him.

There may often be greater heroism in holding by life than in yielding it; the true dignity of maintaining it, and the true dignity of yielding it, were both exemplified in the conduct of Christ. No man ever lived in this world to whom it was such a place of exile as it was to the man Christ Jesus; no loss of earthly relationship the nearest and dearest can ever so eclipse to us the glory of this world, as absence from His Father eclipsed it to Jesus; let His example animate us to take willingly whatever cup our heavenly Father may put into our hands, saying with Job, whose example we may much more closely imitate than ever we can that of Christ, "all the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come, Thou shalt call and I will answer Thee."

VERSES 11, 12, 13. "These things said He: and after that He saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said His disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death; but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep." "After that He saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." The display of God's glory, and that the Son of God might be glorified thereby in connection with the death of Lazarus, was the light of duty which guided Christ's steps back to Judea in the face of every danger which might attend Him there. The title which He gives to Lazarus is one before which all earthly titles of honour pale and go out. There is a community of friendship here which ought to have

been exceedingly endearing to the disciples, as it is exceedingly encouraging to us when we remember that it is a friendship which extends to us, and embraces the entire family of God. "Ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you," was not spoken for the disciples alone, but in terms of the marvellous intercessory prayer for "all who should believe on Him through their word." This friendship subsisting among all the members of the body of Christ has not full play in this world. So much of imperfection, so much of the old man remains in the very best, and still more in the babes in Christ; so much of the spirit of this present evil world, so much of the lust of the eyes and of the pride of life, that alas the elements of repulsion, if not strong enough to alienate, are too often strong enough to keep apart those who, as members of the one body of Christ, should feel themselves to be members one of another.

A proud Christian, a hard-hearted, a covetous Christian is one of the worst of all possible contradictions, but is it never exhibited in the life of the professed follower of the meek and lowly and loving one? "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples if ye have love one to another;" and at one time so thoroughly did the disciples, the followers of Christ, enter into the spirit of this law of love that the world could not help observing and remarking on it, "Behold how these Christians love one another." There is not probably the same opportunity for such a marked display of really Christian brotherly love in a professedly Christian land as when the disciples of Christ were scattered among the heathen nations,

but there is far more opportunity, we fear, than is embraced, to mark, by the prevalence of love, our relation to Christ. Did we remember the applicability to the very meanest of Christ's followers, of the ennobling assurance, "henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth, but I have called you friends," we would not look down upon any of the brotherhood in Christ, especially when we remember that the last now may be first by-and-bye and first for ever.

"Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." It is a beautiful and soothing figure under which Christ represents death to us here. Death was the penalty of disobedience; and in this view it could not have been characterised as sleep which conveys the idea of quiet peaceful repose—an idea very different from what we must conceive of the penalty of disobedience. And it is only when and where Christ has abolished death that it can with any propriety be thus spoken of even now. It is a heart comforting figure when we think of departed friends who died in the Lord falling asleep in Jesus; and equally so, when we remember that it is appointed to all once to die, and our own part in the appointment—"Them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." The figure is, indeed, applied even to those who sleep in the dust of the earth, who shall "awake to shame and everlasting contempt"; but though the same term may be used, how widely different the thing—the repose of the one is the quiet rest of the man who has no cause to fear the coming day, while that of the other is the sleep of the man who in laying himself

down knows that he has to awake to the terror and the ignominy of a death under the sentence of human law. The death of the believer is the sleep of a man who is at peace with God, and who ere he falls on sleep is well assured that joy will come in the morning—a morning without a cloud.

The disciples, understanding the term literally, wondered that the Lord should think of going to awaken this friend out of what they believed to be a gracious restorative, and, very possibly, labouring under the fear of danger in Judea, they may have thought when told plainly that Lazarus was dead, that it was something of the latest to go to him now, for so far as appears they did not realise the meaning of his being awakened out of sleep to be his recall to life. We are all very apt to misunderstand the meaning of many of the Lord's dealings with us, sometimes to take mercy for judgment, and at other times to forget that whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth; and, doubtless, at times to overlook the fact that the Lord is contending with us. This latter is the most dangerous misunderstanding of all, for whilst the other might compromise our comfort or our peace, this might, what is still more important, our safety. The Lord's way is sometimes even to His own people in the sea, and His path in the great waters, but at latest it shall come to pass that at evening time there shall be light. Jacob found it so when after declaring "all these things are against me," he had to acknowledge to Joseph, "I had not thought to see thy face, and God hath showed me also thy seed." And even though weeping should

endure for all the night, with the morning shall come joy.

VERSES 14, 15. "Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him." "Lazarus is dead," said Jesus, and He adds, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there to the intent ye may believe." He speaks as any mere man might have done of the ordering of Providence in the matter. How far, as man, He was subject to the ordinary disposings of Divine Providence, and how far these orderings were foreknown by Him we cannot know. We know that He could and did read the thoughts of the mind, and the feelings of the hearts of those who were about Him, yet He tells His disciples that of the great day of His second coming, no man knoweth—"no, not the Son, but the Father." We can attach no intelligible meaning to these words other than that while He, as the Son of God, knew all things; as the Son of Man, there was at least this one thing which He did not know. It is difficult, indeed impossible, for us to conceive how any of the natures of the one person of Christ could be ignorant of that which the other must know. As the constitution of His person is a mystery, so must necessarily be its operations. But the language used by Him in regard to the woman who touched His clothes and was healed of her infirmity, and that used by Him here, in respect to his absence from Bethany at this particular time, lead to the idea that as He was subject to all the sinless infirmities of our nature, so He may have been, at least

at times, to the ordinary disposing of the providence of His Father, after the manner of all men.

"I am glad I was not there to the intent ye may believe." That ye may believe what? Peter had made before now the declaration of his belief, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," a belief no doubt common to him with all the disciples. But while they believed in Him as the Christ, it is evident that their ideas of who, or what the Christ was, were very vague and unfixed. We do not believe that until after the resurrection, or rather till after the day of Pentecost, they had any clear and settled conviction of who Christ really was. This seems plainly brought out by Philip when he said "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us," it seems very plain that they had not yet known that in seeing Christ, they had seen the Father. The great mystery of godliness "God manifest in the flesh," was as yet to them a doctrine unapprehended, at least in its fullness of the Son's equal participation in the Divine nature with the Father. It is very evident that amongst the Jews generally, with all their longing for the coming of their expected Messiah, their ideas regarding His nature were exceedingly vague. It is evident from the questions put to John by the priests and Levites sent from Jerusalem, that they did not, at least with any degree of conviction, comprehend that the Christ and the Prophet foretold by Moses were one and the same person; indeed their language seems almost to imply that they thought that the Christ, and the Prophet like to Moses and Elias, might all be different persons, or for any settled assurance

on their part might be but different names for the same person. Witness, also, the all but universally prevalent idea, that for any one in human form to claim such a fatherhood in God, as implied equality with God was to be guilty of blasphemy. All this is perhaps not greatly to be wondered at, considering the greatness of the mystery, although the intimations of it in the Old Testament Scriptures were neither few nor obscure ; but the word and works of Christ have rendered this all-important doctrine so plain that the very runner may read, and our only wonder now is, how any one receiving the Bible as the Word of God can miss it. We are convinced that a root of prejudice, and the pride of understanding which abhors mysteries lies consciously or unconsciously at the root of its rejection.

The miracle of which they were to be witnesses is one of such Divine power, exhibiting such a mastery over both death and the grave, as to be well calculated both to confirm and extend their faith—it was this latter which was most needed in the instance of the disciples. They had faith, but it required, if not confirmation in intensity, at least increase in extent. We do not see any reason to believe that even this mighty miracle led to a firm apprehension of Jesus as the Son of God and one with the Father. No doubt, however, it was one of those mighty works which, when once their eyes were opened by the Holy Ghost, would serve to confirm and animate their faith and hope, and also to strengthen them in their course of conflict with the powers of this world, and to meet death as already more than conquerors over it. It was a

signal proof of the truth that the living One, who was dead and is alive for evermore, does indeed hold the keys of death and of the invisible world ; a truth than which none could be better fitted to disarm death of his sting, and to nerve the hearts of the soldiers of the Cross to meet death in whatever form the powers of this world might present it to the followers of the Crucified. Every other instance of revived life might be called rather a restoration than a resurrection ; but that of Lazarus was resurrection in the true meaning of the term, a prelibation of that day when all that are in the graves shall hear Christ's voice and shall come forth.

VERSE 16. "Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with Him." "Then said Thomas, Let us also go that we may die with Him." The Gospel does not destroy the several idiosyncracies of the human mind, it only purifies and elevates them. How marked the distinction between Thomas and Peter. The latter was daring and impetuous, and like most such men, forward and impulsive, while Thomas seems to have been hard of belief, and, at the same time, far more timid than his fellow-disciple. We do not question his love to his Master, nor his readiness to share whatever peril that love required at his hand. But while we admit his willingness to die with his Lord, if need were, we think we perceive, in the language he here employs, a feeling of disappointment at the idea of running into danger, as it seemed to him, without sufficient cause—danger had driven them out of Judea, and, doubtless, he thought that danger awaited

their return thither. Yet if their Lord will go, both honour and affection require that they share the danger, and so says Thomas, Let us go that we may die with Him. The danger was such in his view, that to go into Judea at present was just to go to death. They had seen power enough exhibited by the Lord, and they had had experience enough of His wisdom and of the loving nature of His heart to enable them to trust Him thoroughly, if they were only prepared to do justice to Him and to themselves. But, Lord, what is man ? If left to himself he is but vanity at his best estate.

If we are right in ascribing a degree of petulance to Thomas, and in which he very probably did not stand wholly alone, dare we cast the first stone at him ? We fear not. Do we always remember who it is that is the absolute disposer of our lot ? and are all His disposings, regarding our friends and ourselves, as respects their worldly lot and ours, always subjects of humble un murmuring acquiescence ; and while the affliction is upon our loins, can we still say, "Thy will be done ?" We profess to believe that the bounds of our habitation are appointed by infinite wisdom that cannot err, and accompanied by infinite goodness that will not injure, but bless every humble trusting soul, but has this conviction always repressed every murmur, and stilled every fear ; and when clouds and darkness were upon the way in which the Lord was leading us, so that we had to follow Him, as it were, in the dark, was it enough for us to be assured that what we knew not then we should know hereafter ? We fear that not very many of God's people can

answer such questions as these in the affirmative, but rather all must confess that they have not glorified God in the fires, and have rather submitted than cheerfully acquiesced. Sullen submission is not the proper attitude of a child of God. When we think of the priceless heritage of the children of God, and of the infinite cost of its attainment, we feel that distrust, even in its very least measure, is at once dishonouring to God and injurious to our own interest and our own comfort. The most unlimited confidence in God is that which alone truly glorifies Him and maintains the heart in perfect peace. Therefore, let us trust and glorify God, trust and fear not, and we shall be made more than conquerors.

VERSE 17. "Then when Jesus came, He found that he had *lain* in the grave four days already." When Jesus came to Bethany, He found that Lazarus had already been in his grave four days. It had been prophesied of Christ, "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise, awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust," and now there is to be a mighty earnest of its truth. He had before spoiled death, He is now about to spoil the grave. Lazarus is dead, and his body is in the sepulchre, but his spirit, where? Except that it was in the keeping of God who gave it, we cannot tell. Secret things belong unto the Lord our God, and into what the Lord has manifestly kept secret we must not pry; it is as much duty to be content with ignorance, where the Lord has erected a barrier to knowledge, as to endeavour to be wise up to what is written. We know that the spirit of man never dies, not (as we conceive) that

it is naturally immortal and incapable of extinction, for that which once was not might by possibility again not be; there can be no natural, necessary immortality but that which is eternal; of that only which had no beginning can it be assuredly predicated that it shall have, can have, no end. But upon angels and men God has bestowed the marvellous gift of immortality, so that though there was a time when neither angels nor men existed, there will never come a time when they shall cease to exist, "every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from above." We know too little of spiritual existence to be able either to affirm or deny that it can even slumber or be cast into a deep sleep. And thus, how the spirits were occupied of those who were recalled from the state of the dead, Scripture being silent, we can know nothing.

The Divine origin of the Scriptures is perhaps little less satisfactorily proved, by their silence than by their revelations; only the revelations are of infinite importance, while the silence is upon subjects which, though deeply interesting, are, as yet, at least, more subjects of curiosity than of present duty, or of future well-being. Had the miracles of recalling the dead, recorded in Scripture, been fictitious miracles, and the record of imposition by designing men, what an opportunity was thus afforded them of various revelations from the unseen world; opportunity which we cannot doubt would have been availed of to disclose that world to the ardent curiosity of their admiring but deceived auditors. Curiosity would have been satiated by the abundance of the disclosures, touching upon every topic which the human heart

desires to have information upon. Place, occupation, enjoyments, honours, all would have been revealed in amplitude of detail. But of all this, not a word from the lips of those whom either the Lord Himself or His apostles recalled to life. There is not a word to indicate, even whether they could have told anything. The miracles just stand for themselves, proof of a Divine power accompanying a Divine message, and that a message of spiritual restoration to the dead in trespasses and sins. Upon that point the message is clear and urgent, and there is nothing intermingled with it which, though it might gratify even a natural curiosity, might withdraw attention from the main object of the revelation. There is enough of the spiritual world revealed to make Christ precious, and His salvation the paramount object of desire to us; following Him, we shall not walk in darkness, even now, and we shall in due time reach the inheritance of the saints in light.

VERSES 18, 19. "Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off. And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother." The family at Bethany seem to have been like Demetrius, in that they had a good report of all men, and certainly they had it of the Truth Himself. Many came to comfort the sisters concerning their brother. Many seem to have been aware of the loving concord which bound every member of the family to every other member, and the breach which had been made in it excited a widespread sympathy, expressed in such words of comfort as man can apply to his fellow-man. Very deep such

comforts may not go, yet it is grateful to the feelings of the bereaved ones, while it is seemly on the part of Christian friendship and neighbourhood. "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, oh ye, my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me." Sooner or later we all need sympathy, our friends, like ourselves, are subject to sickness and death; and the worldly state, which is to-day plentiful, may to-morrow be straitened even to carefulness. The sympathy we are called to manifest to man as our fellow-man, and especially to those who are our brethren in Christ, must embrace not words of comfort only, but deeds of beneficence according to our ability and our brother's need; "bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Sympathy should not only be proportioned to the affliction which calls it forth, but should bear a direct relation to it. It is not enough to weep with those who weep, we must be ready to distribute, willing to communicate.

It is mockery to condole with distress, if we could alleviate it and do not. "I was hungry and ye gave Me meat, thirsty and ye gave Me drink (says Jesus), for inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me." What an energy of encouragement is here to large-hearted sympathy and open-handed liberality. "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver." Himself, the bountiful One, who openeth His hand wide, and supplies the wants of all His creatures, every good and every perfect gift coming

down from Him. May we not err in setting too light by the actings of Christian beneficence, as well as on the side of overvaluing the positively and much more the comparatively little we have ever done for Christ. He in whose sight the death of His saints is precious, does evidently set store by the loving ministry exercised by His people toward these His saints, and though it often is, and always, so far as possible, should be a hidden service, it is one which He will reward openly. It is a work, indeed, which is purely the fruit of grace, and the reward is the reward of grace. "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

VERSES 20-22. "Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him; but Mary sat still in the house. Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee." Active, energetic, and impulsive, Martha no sooner hears of Jesus coming than she goes forth to meet Him. Mary, not less loving, but more meek, retiring, and unobtrusive, remains at home even while her heart is as fully gone forth to Jesus as Martha's was able to be, but her nature is too gentle and too modest for any demonstration of her feelings. There is place in the kingdom of God on earth for every variety of natural temperament, from the most impulsive to the most retiring, and when sanctified by the Holy Ghost through the Word of God and prayer, work also as well as place. Among the apostles

there was a John as well as a Peter, and each found his proper place in the work of the kingdom, and no doubt each earned the "well done good and faithful servant" after they had fulfilled their course. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all."

There is faith in Martha's words, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here my brother had not died," but it is defective even when supplemented by what she immediately adds. There is a recognition of power, of great power even, but not of Divine power and of Divine omniscience—as if she had said, Thy presence would have prevented death, and even now Thy presence could bring life back. It is the same confusion of thought regarding Christ which characterised the apostles themselves till after the day of Pentecost. We need not greatly marvel at this, for God manifest in the flesh, seen by the bodily eye, is truly a great mystery. To believe and to realize as absolute matter of fact, that the man who stands before me in visible flesh and blood, is the invisible God, the Creator of the heavens and of the earth, is no small or easy attainment. Our circumstances for answering the question, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" seem to be quite as favourable as were those of them who saw Christ in the flesh. We are very apt to conceive that we have lost much in not having lived in the days when the Son of God walked the earth as a Son of Man, and when miracles vouched for the character of God's messengers. We have great doubt as to the truth of this idea; no doubt such overwhelming proof

as was given to Thomas might or would have produced conviction of the truth even in the most incredulous; but conviction of the truth is not conversion. We should not like to say that miracles were never made instrumental to conversion, but we are well persuaded that such cases were very rare. But however highly we may estimate the privilege of those who saw Christ in the flesh, and who witnessed the wonderful exhibitions of His power, we are placed at least on a level with them by the assurance of Jesus Himself, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Look at the effect as declared by Jesus Himself of the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and the fishes, upon at least by far the greater number of those who saw and participated in the miracles—"Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." What a miserable effect to be produced on the minds of intelligent and immortal beings by the presence of One wielding power so wonderful, and by an act so completely beyond the reach of all the powers of unassisted nature. Not a thought called up beyond the present in the lowest of its interests, nor so far as appears a single care as to what the appearance of such a teacher among them might signify, or how it might affect them as subjects of the moral government of God.

"But I know that even now" the case is not remediless—hopeless, if thou wilt but ask of God, He will give thee even the life of my brother. This was truly no small faith in the face of death and burial, for she could have heard of no case completely ana-

logous in all her experience of the Lord's miraculous power. She knew that He had rescued from death, but there was no instance of rescuing from the grave. No doubt the man Christ Jesus was the servant of the Father; it was His meat to do the will of the Father, and to finish His work, and yet He could say what no other servant of the Father dared to say, "Father, glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son may also glorify Thee." The faith in Him which extended to His being the faithful servant, and the well beloved of the Father, was true faith, but it was a defective faith which, while it regarded Him as the Son of God, did not attach to the term Son of God that fulness and singularity of meaning which separated Him by an infinite distance from all other sons of God whether in heaven or on earth. And we believe it was in this particular that the faith of apostles and disciples came short, ay, and until the promised Comforter came and led them into all truth. The centurion who sent to Christ to heal his servant, evidently came nearer (if he did not reach it altogether) to the perfect faith in the nature of Jesus, than any of all those who followed Him; "Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel." And it is very remarkable that the two most signal instances of faith were manifested by two Gentiles, a man and a woman, both of heathen extraction, as the greatest instance of liberality recorded in the Scriptures, is that of a poor widow, probably the poorest in all the land of Judah.

VERSES, 23, 24. "Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto Him, I know

that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." It is not to be very much wondered at that Martha did not apprehend the meaning of Christ's word, "Thy brother shall rise again." The very knowledge that she had of the general resurrection of all the dead at the last day, would help to blunt her sensibility to the real meaning of Christ's words. While on the other hand her own expressed conviction of Christ's power with the Father might have directed her hope into the channel of even a present resurrection; but this even coupled with the love which she knew the Lord bore to her and hers, did evidently not give rise to the hope of again seeing her brother a partaker with her in the social fellowship of the home in Bethany. Brought up as we have been from our earliest infancy in the knowledge communicated by God to men in the Holy Scriptures, we are barely capable of forming an idea of our indebtedness to the revelation made to us in the Book of God. The sages of antiquity, the very wisest and best of them, could not have said what Martha did, "I *know* that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." This great truth with which every child among us is now conversant and under more or less of the power of which we grow up and are influenced by, was a truth but very dimly conceived, and conceived not as truth, but scarcely as a probability, mainly as a mere possibility by the very wisest of the heathen. They were characterised by the same ignorance in regard to the origin of the material world; and in regard to the origin of moral evil, we have a knowledge which they did not possess—a knowledge which, while it does

not dispel the mystery, at least enables us to justify God, and to lay the blame upon man as the sole author of his own undoing.

We have no record in the Scriptures of more than three instances of a raising from the dead by Christ Himself—the first the widow's son at Nain, the second Jairus' daughter, and third Lazarus. But are we entitled from this to conclude that there was no other instance? We think not. It was after restoring the widow's son, and before the restoration of Jairus' daughter, that John sent this message to Jesus, "Art Thou He that should come?" when the Lord sent back the reply that, among many other wonderful works, "the dead *are* raised." Now we do not deny that the answer would be true enough, though at the time only one had been raised. But when we regard the language as plural, the dead *are* raised, and when we remember the words of John in the conclusion of the gospel indited by him, "and there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written," we do not feel that we should be warranted in saying that while Jesus did many miracles which are not recorded, we have the record of every instance of a restoration from death to life. Be this as it may, the resurrection of Lazarus, next after the resurrection of Christ Himself, whether we regard it as it stands in its own native grandeur and simplicity, or as in connection with the important announcement of Christ (an announcement indeed of infinite importance), made at the grave of Lazarus, is the miracle

which stands out with most prominence of all of which we have the record. It was and is, and shall be while the world endures, a standing monument to the truth that there shall be a "resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust." We are not done with this world when death comes and releases us from all our obligations in connection with it; it will come up again in the shape of duties fulfilled or neglected, and awards of eternal endurance will reveal the infinite importance which attached to the fast fleeting days by which we often held so very lightly while they were passing over us. We shall then realise the importance of the admonition to "redeem the time," while it was yet in our power to redeem it.

VERSES 25, 26. "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?" The words which constitute Jesus' reply to Martha, are words than which weightier were never uttered, and never will be. They illustrate and confirm Christ's declaration of Himself—"I am the light of the world." The connection of Christ with the resurrection of His own redeemed people is easily traced. He Himself in His human nature rose to honour, glory, and immortality—"In that He died, He died unto sin once, but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God; death hath no more dominion over Him;" but His people participate in all that is His: it is not a mere beholding of His glory that is reserved for them, but "the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them that they may be

one, even as We are one. I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one." The connection of the resurrection of Christ with that which is unto condemnation is more obscure; whether apart from the interposition of Christ there would have been any resurrection, or whether the sinner would have been transferred in his body and in his guilt by means of a change equivalent to death into the world of retribution it is bootless to enquire because we cannot know, and that simply because it has not been revealed. But this we do know that it is the sinner's own great fault, and not simply his misfortune, that rather than be raised again he would sooner that the rocks and hills should cover him, and hide him from the face of Him who sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. For "the hour is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth." "In Adam all die; by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin." Thus the first man might have said of himself in relation to his posterity, I am your death, for by me hath sin entered, and death by sin; but while the first Adam was made a living soul, the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, was made a quickening spirit; and so He could say, "I am the life." In regard to the believer, therefore, "the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness."

"I am the resurrection and the life." It is His voice that the sleepers in the grave shall hear, and it is at His bidding that they shall come forth—and a blessed voice it will prove to all who sleep in Jesus. Whether there shall be two material resurrections, the

one antecedent to the other by a thousand years, as seems to be intimated in the 20th chapter in the book of the Revelations, we are sure that there must be two resurrections in the experience of every saved soul; in this world a spiritual resurrection from spiritual death, and a bodily resurrection at length into the likeness of Christ's glorified body, "for if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also of His resurrection;" "and as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."

"I am the life." "The life was manifested and we have seen it, and bear witness and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us." He is the living One who was dead, but is alive for evermore, and holds the keys of death and of life. Existence in misery and degradation is not life. The proper idea of life contains in it enjoyment in the favour of God, and in the exercise of the functions which pertain to life; hence the continued existence of the wicked is spoken of as death, while to His own people Christ says, "Because I live ye shall live also." To have Christ then is to have life, and to have life in Christ is to have light—the light of life. Severed from Christ we have neither light nor life; nor can have—"He is the head of the body the Church;" in and with the head the members live, and from the head have nourishment and protection and guidance, and while the Head lives, the body cannot, will not die. Thus the Head ever living, for He has life in Himself, the body cannot perish; and no member of the body needs ever to be

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cut off. And so Christ says, "He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." The death of the body, the mere separation of the soul from the body is not death in the highest import of the term, and all the less when the separation is but temporary to be followed by an eternal re-union—"Though he were dead;" but then the body dies because of sin, for the wages of sin is death—it reaps the just reward of its own proper work; but "the spirit is life because of righteousness"—the just reward of the work of the Head who not only fulfilled the law, but magnified it and made it honourable.

"And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." The believer in Me, though he were dead, yet shall live, or living shall never die. Is there not something like a contradiction here? It is the dead believer that is to live—he was a believer and yet is dead; while of the living believer it is said he shall not die. There is no real contradiction at all, barely even a seeming one; it is appointed unto all once to die, and yet God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Can that man be said to die who is to be immediately with Christ in Paradise? We know that death is penal; and even to the believer it retains just so much of its natural character as to remind him of God's holy hatred of sin; but when to depart is to be with Christ, is not the sting drawn from death, and the grave spoiled of its victory? And do we not derive great comfort, not only from the fact that our departed friends who died in the Lord are even now alive with the Lord, but that their very bodies resting in the grave are the Lord's property,

and that "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints?" In the face and remembrance of all this, do we not hear the Lord addressing us as He did Martha, "believest thou this?" If we did, should we be in *bondage* by the fear of death, from which Christ came to deliver us, manifesting at the same time His power to fulfil every word of promise which He has left with us for our comfort and encouragement? If we did, should we ever be found mourning over departed friends—that is, friends of whom we are assured that they fell asleep in Jesus, as if we had no hope in their present well-being, or none of our ever meeting them again? Is it thus we requite the Lord? Is it thus we honour Him? Let not our belief that Jesus died and rose again be left to be gathered from the profession of our lips, but be manifested in all our feelings in regard to departed friends, and in regard to the anticipation of our own departure.

VERSES 27, 28. "She saith unto Him, yea, Lord: I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world. And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, the Master is come, and calleth for thee." The reply which Martha makes to the Lord's question, "believest thou this," would in the mouth of a believer of our day, be eminently satisfactory, because we should know that the term "Son of God" carried a meaning equivalent to a confession of the proper Divinity of the Lord Jesus. This would be the fact at least of the vast majority of avowed Christians. How it is possible for any man honestly

to confess that he believes the Bible to be a revelation from God, to read the announcements in the Old Testament Scriptures regarding the nature and character of the Messiah who was to come, and to read in the New what Christ says of Himself, and to come to the conclusion that He is but a created being, is to us quite inconceivable. That He claimed to be more is as manifest as anything can be, and that all that He claimed to be was homologated by the Father is equally plain; and if all this fail to convince, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead. For it is not the mean of a reasonable conviction that is wanting, but a heart open to conviction, a heart that has been touched by the Spirit of God.

We know that Martha's conceptions of Christ were very high, but we do not think they reached that truly infinite elevation which truly belonged to the man Christ Jesus. "Thou art the Christ the Son of God which should come into the world." The seed of the woman is come at last, the long looked for, the much longed for Messiah, the desire of all nations: the great subject of prophecy, the antetype of all types, He who should come. That coming was the great hope of the Church from Adam to Abraham, from Abraham to the appearing of Christ it was the main hope and stay of the Jewish people, while even the Gentile world also had an expectation and hope (no doubt derived by tradition from the first promise) of a great restorer of the race, and who should introduce a golden age into the chronicles of time, and renew the face of the world. "He that should come" is the hope of the Church still, and His coming is the great object

of the faith of the Church, and then the mystery of God will be finished, for He will appear a second time "without sin, unto salvation." Our circumstances in regard to His second coming are thus far different from those of the expectants of His first coming, that whilst generation after generation passed away, and still He came not until the very fulness of the time was come, His second coming may be said to be realised when death transfers the scene of our existence from the shadows of time to the realities of eternity. He is then come in so far as respects the final and unchangeable issue of our present mortal existence; the tree has fallen, and so it must lie for ever; the awards of the final judgment are so far anticipated; the believer knows that Christ, with whom he now is, will be his portion for ever, and it is only his open acknowledgment by Christ that awaits the judgment of the great day. Meanwhile he is blessed in spirit in the enjoyment of Christ, an enjoyment which the reunion of soul and body will enlarge and intensify. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, they rest from their labours and their works do follow them." What works? The work of faith and the labour of love: "this is the work of God, that ye believe in Him whom God hath sent"; "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto Me." The brotherhood, which is, alas! too much of a mere profession now, will be seen then to have been a great reality, and if regret could enter heaven, there would be regret that its spirit was not more fully adopted, and carried out into the practice of "contributing to

the necessities of saints," and making the mammon of unrighteousness to contribute to the comfort of the heirs of glory.

"The Master is come and calleth for thee." They were welcome news to Mary, both that the Master was come and that He called for her. "Ye call Me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am"; and to Mary He was, in the strictest and fullest sense of the words, all that these terms imply. It is a very comforting idea to be able to turn the angel of death into a messenger of Christ, to say the Master is come and calleth for thee. When the humble believer can in a gracious measure realise this as truth, it will enable him to obey the summons as cheerfully as did Mary the call of Jesus through her sister Martha. And while it is not given to every Christian man or woman thus to meet death as it were with triumph, there is always peace, generally good hope through grace, and sometimes, to the praise of God, such assurance of the coming glory as almost to amount to a foretaste of the blessedness of the Father's house: and God is glorified, and believing onlookers are cheered and encouraged. What a sensation of joy unspeakable and full of glory must be that of timid spirits who have long groaned under the burden of a spirit of bondage, not so much of a fear of death, but of their interest in Him who hath abolished death and brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel. All doubt will then have fled, and given place to the absolute assurance of waking bliss.

VERSES 29, 30, 31. "As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto Him. Now Jesus was


not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met Him. The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there." "When she heard she arose quickly." Ardent love drew her, not slowly nor reluctantly, but speedily: "draw me, we will run after thee," expressed the desire of the spouse after her beloved, and Mary felt with the spouse and acted with her. Are we wrong in believing that the heart's desire of this humble, weak, and unobtrusive lover of the Lord was met in the heart of the Lord with the feeling expressed in the prophetic words of the song, "how fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse?" Sure we are, that there is not a heart breathing after Christ, arising from any—the utmost corner of the land—but is known to and reciprocated—yes, far more than reciprocated—by the loving heart of the man Christ Jesus.

Even the courtesy due to sympathising friends could not restrain the ardour of Mary's love. The attraction of her Lord's presence overbore every other consideration. It was no want of sympathy that kept Jesus from going to Mary in place of her going to Him. Did we know all the circumstances, we should, without doubt, observe that it was the delicacy of truest friendship that dictated the conduct pursued by the Lord. At such a time He would not meet her first in the home that had been desolated by the absence of a fervently loved brother and a truly loving and truly loved friend. The old home, when the Lord had taken away its master from its head, would recall

associations too painful; it is better that they meet under these new circumstances in a new place; and though that place be probably in the immediate neighbourhood of the grave of Lazarus, He will invest that grave with a glory which shall not comfort the heart of Mary only, but the heart of many a sorrow-stricken traveller through this vale of tears. He will there glorify His Father, and there His Father will glorify Him. "He will swallow up death in victory, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces, and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth." "I have heard many such things (said Job): miserable comforters are ye all." But such a character can never be given to the comforts provided by Christ, and dealt out by Christ's people one toward another; for as one whom his mother comforteth, so are all who are comforted of Christ. Whatever their sorrow be, their consolation aboundeth by Christ; whether the Christian weeps by the death-bed, or goes to the grave to weep there, he is not swallowed up of sorrow, for he cannot sorrow as those who have no hope. By faith he sees the grave resigning its charge, and the last enemy, death, destroyed. "The Lord my God will come, and all the saints with thee."

VERSE 32. "Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying unto Him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." It is remarkable that both the sisters use precisely the same cast of words. Often, probably, had they used them in sorrowful communing between themselves in the days of their sorrow, while

their brother was pining away before their eyes. Oh, if the Lord were but here—if He were our brother should not die. And now that He is come His presence recalls the hope so often uttered, but which seems now buried in the grave of Lazarus, at least until the great day when all that are in their graves shall hear His voice. What a sight will that be; even independently of the awards of the judgment, with its everlasting issues, the numbers, by man innumerable, will be a spectacle of such overpowering grandeur as created mind in the present immature state of its faculties could not behold without being overwhelmed. But this awful solemn gathering our eyes shall see, and of that mighty concourse we individually shall form a part. There shall be no disengaged, uninterested spectator there. Each stands in his own lot at the end of the days, and when the mystery of God is finished there will be no gainsayers, no proud heart daring to contend with God, and God will be justified when He speaketh and clear when He judgeth. There are proud and haughty scorers now while God is keeping silence, but the time is drawing rapidly on when He will no more keep silence, but speak out. Two words of His decide all: "Come ye, blessed of My Father," and "Depart from Me, ye cursed." What a change of places, and of relations, too, there will be in that day: the purple and the fine linen will exchange places with the ragged raiment of the humble believer, and the sumptuous fare of Dives shall give place to the food and the raiment which the believer in the days of his flesh, having, was therewith content. What a difference of appraisement



there will then be between the good things which perished in the using of the mortal life, and the good things of the kingdom which is to endure for ever. Will any sacrifice ever made for Christ be then thought of as under-compensated, or shall a shadow of regret mingle with the present joy, whether in regard to privations in the past, or the lack of many comforts, which was at the time deeply felt, though humbly and unrepiningly, even cheerfully, acquiesced in.

VERSES 33, 34. "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto Him, Lord, come and see." Mary weeping, the Jews also weeping, it could not be that the kindest heart that ever lodged in human bosom should remain unaffected: "He groaned in the spirit and was troubled." It was not the death of one human being only, not alone the desolation of one human household, that was present to His spirit and drew forth His groaning and His trouble. This, for the time, occupied the attention and the sympathies of relatives and friends. This was but one item of the vast account which lay spread out before His eye—comprehending, doubtless, sin in Heaven, sin in Eden, sin among angels, sin in men, and sin in its fatal effect in the unransomed for ever. It is sin that by death severs ties of flesh and blood; it is sin that by its own inherent evil, and by its hatefulness in the sight of a holy God, produces that most fearful of all severances, the alienation of the creature from its Creator, the separation of the

soul from God, and thus from all goodness and all real enjoyment: "God's favour is life," but "there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Christ in His human nature knew and had felt the blessedness which the human nature could possess in the friendship of God, and well He knew that, apart from God, man could never possess either present peace or hope from the future. That human nature of Christ should be a source of strong consolation to us; it was in virtue of it that He was capable of offering Himself for us a sacrifice to God for the sin of sinners of the human family; through it He knows our temptations and trials in a way which comes closer home to our hearts than if He knew them only through the omniscience of His Godhead; are there fightings without and fears within—doubt Him not, for He who was Himself heard in that He feared will never fail His weak but trusting people. He is with you in life, He will be with you in death; and when you see the great white throne at last, you will see that He who sitteth thereon is the Son of man, who loved you and gave Himself for you.

You cannot enter into the sorrow of your brother man, however closely related to you, with a sympathy so pure or so intense as the heart of Jesus yields to the sorrows of His brethren. To whom would you go to tell your grief? Would it be to the man that is at ease in his possessions, the man who cannot enter into your grief, because he never felt it, or, if you could find such a one, to "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," and who not only has the mind to discern but the heart to feel? Jesus has

both these qualities, and superadded to this the knowledge of your sorrow, the experience of your grief. "Behold and see if there was ever sorrow like unto My sorrow, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Me." Can you realise His sorrow as, notwithstanding His divinity, a real sorrow? then may you also realise it as truth that in all your afflictions He is afflicted, and that out of them all He the Lord will deliver you. Can the head rejoice while a member suffers? Think not so, but believe that the Head of the spiritual body in heaven feels with the suffering member on earth as truly, as fully, as the head on earth can feel for its fellow member on earth—yes, more closely and more fully, and with effects far more powerful.

VERSES 35, 36, 37. "Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how He loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" "*Jesus wept.*" Are they not strange words? Is it not a strange act? For they are not spoken of the Babe of Bethlehem, but of the Man who commanded the wind and the waves and they obeyed Him—of the Man who had healed the sick and had raised the dead—why should He weep? *We* weep over wounds which we cannot heal, over sorrows which we cannot cure, but Jesus could do all things, and yet He wept. It is said of some sorrows that they are too deep for tears; but go deeper with that same sorrow and the tears will come. It was not a light sorrow that drew those tears from Him who gave sight to the blind, who made the tongue of the dumb to sing, and made the lame to leap as an hart.

His was a sorrow which sprung from a depth of appreciation of sin and of the effects of sin, which no mere creature intelligence could fathom. No sorrow of His own drew tears from His eyes, though ere long a sorrow all His own was to make Him sweat drops of blood. Twice we read of His weeping, and we read of His rejoicing in spirit, but both acts, however different in outward appearance, had their origin in a feeling which was common to both—the sin of the creature and the glory of the Creator accounts for both. He wept at the grave of Lazarus, He wept over the impending destruction of Jerusalem, and but for sin Lazarus had never needed a grave, and Jerusalem, with its mountains round about it, had never tasted the bitterness of a besieged city, nor seen the face of a conquering foe. This Man of tears was He whose birth had been foretold, and when accomplished in the manger at Bethlehem had been celebrated by angels, the willing messengers of His Father, and the willing heralds of His own glory. The heir of all things a weeping man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief to its utmost depths. Mystery how profound.

In Him the utmost depths of grief and humiliation, and the highest conceivable exaltation in glory, met and were reconciled: the harmony of His nature and character and condition was complete. We have only another instance upon record of Jesus having wept. "When He beheld the city (Jerusalem) He wept over it (and said), If thou hadst known, at least in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes." And He felt all the pity which His tears and His words expressed;

but that pity did not lead Him to turn away its bitter doom. The brotherhood, according to the flesh, which subsists between Christ and those who are brethren according to the spirit also, avails to their unspeakable advantage both in this world and in that which is to come. There is brotherly sympathy and brotherly help now—help perhaps often when the helping is overlooked, and could not be very easily traced. And in the great future there is their open and everlasting acknowledgment by Him, who will even then bear the evidence of His relationship in the body in which He arose from the dead and ascended up into heaven. But what will avail to the unbeliever the mere relationship according to the flesh? It will avail him nothing for good; it will not arrest nor mitigate the righteous judgment of his unrighteousness; but it may well aggravate both the condemnation and the sense or feeling of it. What could more intensify evil and make it less endurable than the ineradicable conviction that it is all the work and the procurement of the sufferer himself; that it might have been, and but for the folly and the base guilt of the sinner himself would have been, so utterly different?

The sympathy of Christ was so manifest and so evidently sincere, that it attracted the attention of the Jews who were present: "Behold how He loved him." His love was not the cold courteous love of the world, which is called love because it is not hate; it was an affection which united the loving and the loved, and thus they were interchangeably in one holy bond of blessed brotherhood. Surely there must be some sad falling off in the affectionate intercourse

of Christians in these latter days, as compared with that which animated the members of Christ while the Church was yet in its infancy. What do we see now in the conduct of Christians towards each other that would call forth the wonder and admiration of the outside world—"Behold how these Christians love one another?" We have high authority for saying that when iniquity abounds the love of many waxes cold; and, alas! may there not be much subtle, undetected, unobtrusive iniquity in the Church; a plague spot upon which, if a prophet of God were to come among us, he would put his finger, saying, *That is the accursed thing, and thou art the man?* Perhaps beyond all other sins prevalent among the real members of the Church of Christ is that of worldliness, in some of its shapes, and it would be difficult to decide whether in its shape of covetousness or of the pride of life. Where money is prized for its own sake, or merely for its fruit in the gratifications of the flesh—those lusts which war against the soul—there can be little room for brotherly love, little inclination to spend and to be spent for Christ, and a miserable selfishness will mar the beauty of the fairest profession. If men would only remember and act upon the conviction that wealth is valuable only to the extent of its affording us the comforts of our present existence, and of all the good which we may do by it to the glory of God, it would then be held as what it truly is, a trust, and we should at once glorify God and amazingly promote our own true happiness.

A greedy, grasping, worldly Christian is almost a contradiction in terms: what a mockery to say to

such a man, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, for your sake He became poor." Is it thus that ye requite the Lord, O people, foolish and unwise ?

It was a natural enough question which was raised by some of the spectators, could not the power which opened the eyes of one born blind have even preserved this man in life ? Doubtless it could, if the possessor of the power had so willed. God can do all things that He wills to do, but He does not will all things that He has power to do. The question put among each other by the friends of Lazarus proceeds upon the assumption that, if Jesus could have prevented the death of Lazarus, He either would have done it or should have done it. We do not always, indeed, not often, see so clearly the reason for the acting of God in some special providences as we can see it here. But for the death of Lazarus we should have wanted that glorious display of divine power which, while it glorified God, still ministers comfort to the bereaved when they must bury their dead out of their sight. Why was this evil and the other evil permitted to befall me, may the tried believer often think, even when He does not permit himself to utter it. But let him be assured there is a cause, a reason which, when it is revealed to him in the light of the eternal world, will magnify God's wisdom and God's goodness, and afford subject matter for renewed praise unto Him who loved us, and performed all things for us most perfectly. Why are God's people so often poor in this world ? Not because God could not enrich them all ; not because He who loves a cheerful

giver would grudge to them so small a matter as silver and gold, but He knows what is in man, and when He has tried them He shall bring them forth as gold. God's people have not their inheritance here; but, pilgrims and strangers here, they will come out at last into a wealthy place. The durable riches of the kingdom of God are theirs, but their treasure is laid up where neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and where no thief can break in to steal. Let us, then, be content with such things as we have, for He hath said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

VERSES 38, 39. "Jesus therefore, again groaning in Himself, cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days." Whatever was the grief that drew tears from the eyes of Jesus, it was not a surface sorrow, but had its seat deep in His heart. Again groaning in Himself, He cometh to the grave—surely it could not be *that one* grave, although it contained the body of a friend truly dear, that moved His spirit so deeply, for *it* He was about immediately to spoil of its victory. There was more than one grave before the eye of His spirit at that moment, graves of a darker hue than this, because graves over which hope could not breathe, graves which the occupants would have gladly occupied for ever. May it be that there passed over His spirit even now, a dark shadow from that death of ignominy and suffering which He knew awaited Him not many days hence, when He would have to tread the winepress alone, and when of the

people there should be none with Him. We know that the cup which His Heavenly Father had appointed for Him lay often before the eye of His mind, and that the baptism He had to be baptised with often straitened His spirit till it was accomplished. And at the root of all the evil which He saw around Him, and of all the suffering which He knew awaited Himself, He saw sin, the abominable thing which God hateth, and which, without atonement, the Lord could not pardon. Men hold lightly by sin, but if it could have been pardoned by a mere act of grace the Son of God had never died on the accursed tree. To think otherwise is to think, not only erroneously of the wisdom of God, but in utter derogation of His justice as the Judge of all the earth, and the sovereign ruler over all the worlds. Christ groaning in Himself at the grave of Lazarus saw and felt it to be otherwise.

“Jesus said, take ye away the stone.” It has been often and truly remarked that God works no needless, meaningless miracles. What man can do by the unassisted powers of nature, God will not do by miracle; man could roll away the stone though he could not bring Lazarus forth. The same economy of miracle is observable throughout the whole of the divine record; in how marked contrast to the profusion of needless, unmeaning, and ridiculous and false miracles in which popery and all false faiths indulge, needs only to be remarked in passing. And if this economy of means on the part of Him who saith and it is done is characteristic of God’s dealing in all the dispensations of His providence, and yet further, even in the displays of miraculous power where economy might seem to be

out of place, can it for a moment be imagined that the Son of God would become incarnate, suffer pain and ignominy and death, and all to do what a mere fiat of God could have done, in strict conformity with His character of the righteous God and Judge of the universe? To us it seems most derogatory to the honour of God to imagine so: nothing in the shape of mere example can account for it; nor as a mere display of the evil of sin do we feel that the honour of the divine character would be justified. Nothing short of a dire absolute necessity can justify the wisdom and righteousness of God in the death of Christ; and this, and nothing less than this, fulfils the marvellous truth that "God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son," that the believer in Him should be saved and have eternal life. Is it not this alone which maintains the integrity of the love of God toward sinners of mankind as a love which could find no other outlet but the rent vail of the Redeemer's flesh? To believe that such an apparatus of salvation, involving wonders and mysteries which exercise the faculties of holy angels in their seats of glory, was after all but a make believe, and might have been superseded by an act of righteous unchallengeable authority, is surely to imagine of God as such an one as ourselves, with whom tinsel effect often takes the place of fitness and propriety. That without shedding of blood there is no remission is God's own declaration, and is, we believe, founded not on a mere act of the divine will, but on the unalterable justice of the divine nature.

VERSE 40. "Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see

the glory of God?" Martha had faith in the Lord, but as yet at least it was not of that high character which is ascribed to Abraham. He staggered not at the promise of God, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. Martha, too, had faith, but it was not of that high nature which excludes all doubtfulness. "I know that even now whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee"—that was the language of faith: "by this time He stinketh, for he hath been dead four days"—that again is the language of doubt. Faith should have been able to get the better of a four days' death, else what is to become of those who have been sleeping in the dust of the earth for more than four thousand years. Was not that a rebuke of unbelief—gentle, indeed, and kind, yet a rebuke of unbelief—when Jesus replied to her objection of the four days' death, "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Whether the Lord had said anything bearing more immediately upon a present resurrection of her brother beyond what appears in the record, we cannot know: was there enough in what is recorded to direct her faith and hope to an immediate restoration of the brotherhood which had been broken up by death? We are inclined to think there was. Martha knew that the Lord could raise the dead, for she knew that He had done it. It was when Martha had made confession of her faith in the power of Christ even yet to restore her brother that the Lord said, "Thy brother shall rise again," thereby affording ground for hope at least that the rising should be even now. In place of laying hold of this hope, her thoughts fly off to the

far away resurrection at the end of the world. And now again "he hath been dead four days" comes over her spirit like a dark cloud to damp any hope she may have been cherishing. Faith and doubt seem to have had place by turns, and perplexed by the alternation she knew not what to think or what to hope.

But while there was enough in what we know the Lord did and said to afford a footing for hope, He may have said something unrecorded yet more directly conducive to faith; "Said I not unto thee." At all events, the Lord never calls for an act of faith on the part of His creatures without a sufficient foundation for faith to rest upon. It is faith, not credulity, that the Lord wants at the hand of His people: the word of the Lord is the great foundation of faith, and the Lord has never spoken without giving sufficient evidence of His presence, and that the word for compliance with which He holds His people responsible did indeed come forth from Him. When He sent a messenger to speak in His name, He accredited him by mighty deeds, which pointed to a divine presence and a divine power, and which were truly appeals to faith: how unlike to the lying wonders which make up the popish appeals to the credulity of its votaries. To faith founded upon the word of God all things are possible.

The expostulation which Jesus addressed to Martha has an application wide as the round of Christian earthly experience. Have we been brought through fire and through water into a wealthy place, through fightings without and fears within, through doubt and despondency, then whatever may have been the exer-

cise of our spirits while we were under trial, yet now at least we are called to acknowledge the loving kindness of the Lord, and that henceforth if trouble assail us, we shall believe that we shall yet see the glory of God. But may we not in looking back upon our perplexities, upon the misery caused by our doubts and our fears, feel shame as well as sorrow of heart, that we should ever have distrusted Him, who not only cared for us, but had assured us of His fatherly care; are we not ready to become our own reprovers—"O ye of little faith, wherefore did ye doubt?" By doubting we dishonoured God, marred our own peace, and clouded the hope which would have been our rainbow of promise in the dark and cloudy day. To His own people Christ to the very end of time, is saying just what He said to Martha—"Believe and thou shalt see the glory of God;" but, alas! instead of believing, to the honour of God and the comfort of our own souls, we lay ourselves open to the reproof, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me?"

It is a glorious and blessed truth upon which the believer's faith is called to rest—thou shalt see the glory of God. It is not a peradventure, but an absolute assurance, which sooner or later must be fulfilled, here in this present time, or soon hereafter in that city of God of which such glorious things are spoken, things which it is worth while to die for the attainment of them. "We know that if the earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Surely they have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set

before them. Theirs is a secure asylum ; from within there is neither moth nor rust to corrupt, and from without no thief to break through to steal. The first-born among the many brethren will for ever secure the entire brotherhood in all the honours and immunities of the children of God.

VERSES 41, 42, 43. "Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said, Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always : but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And when He thus had spoken, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth." When the stone is removed from the grave, Jesus makes appeal to His Father. The appeal is a thanksgiving that He had been heard in regard to the great act which He was about to do. "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me." It is a true man and the devoted servant of the Father who speaks ; truly did He say, "I seek not Mine own glory, but the glory of Him who sent Me." There is no challenge here of an independent authority, but a distinct recognition that the Father was greater than He. But how greater ? Greater than the man Christ Jesus as the Son of man and the servant of the Father, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh : greater than the Son even as divine, in respect of relationship and order of place, that relation and order being formulated in the doxology to "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." As the servant of the Father He gives thanks for being heard in that for which He had prayed ; and herein every

true servant of God follows the holy example. But the believer cannot say with the same unrestricted, unmodified meaning of the words, what Christ could—"I knew that Thou hearest Me always"—for He was ever of one mind with the Father, and always did only those things which please Him. It is very true that the believer does know that his heavenly Father does hear his every supplication: but then his prayers, and specially for temporal good, must be offered not as absolute, but as conditional upon the will and wisdom of God.

Christ Himself, once at least, prayed thus conditionally: "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me, yet not My will, but Thine be done." Had the prayer been absolute, doubtless He had been heard, and we had been ruined. In the days of His flesh He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, unto Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared: though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered. The cup did not pass away from Him, and yet He was heard; heard, doubtless, as His people are heard for His sake, in grace according to the need, and strength according to the day. And so "being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him." We know that two natures met in the one person of Christ, and met without intermixture or confusion, each nature possessing its own entirety and integrity. Each nature possessed its own properties, so that while to the divine nature there could be no accession or increase whatever, the human could grow in wisdom

and in age, and in favour with God and man. How the one nature could know all things—possess, in short, infinite knowledge—while the other, subsisting in the same person, should possess but a limited knowledge, is a mystery too deep for us to fathom; and well would it have been for the peace of the Church and for the prevalence of vital godliness, had men been content to be wise up to what is written, and to be ignorant where the Lord hath not spoken, and where, until the Lord speaks, we cannot penetrate.

There are objects which may become subjects of unqualified, unconditional prayer. “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” is prayer of which we are quite sure that it is in accordance with the will of God, and needs no qualification; but there are objects which are lawful subjects of prayer, and yet for all that must be offered in submission to and conditional upon the will of God. Such is prayer in a time of sickness for restoration to health, either in our own persons or in the persons of those dear to us. Hezekiah was heard when after the message sent him from God by the prophet to set his house in order because death was imminent, he sought a prolongation of his days. Yet it is impossible to read his prayer in the light of his subsequent history, without concluding that it was, if not too importunate yet at least too absolute, and with too little reference to the holy will of God. How much better had it been for him had he with a humble expression of his submissive desire left the decision in the hand of God. So to do is our true wisdom and would be our true happiness. To have the crea-

ture will resolved into the will of God is to live not only in security and peace, but in the enjoyment of a confidence which nothing can shake. "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, waiting upon the Lord." "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.

"Because of the people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me." He had given larger evidence of the Divine Nature of His mission, so that He could truly say, "If I had not done among them works which no other man did, they had not had sin, but now they have no cloak for their sin," yet He condescends to embrace this other opportunity (among the last which would be afforded) to convince them that this was their day of merciful visitation, and that this appeal to God in their hearing was made for their benefit if they would but only lay it to their heart. "Turn ye, turn ye, O house of Israel, for why will ye die; wherefore, turn and live ye."

Having thus spoken, "He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth." All is open and in the face of day, clearly before the eyes both of friends and foes, for it is manifest from the following narrative that there were foes present; the very putting the task of rolling away the stone upon the spectators was an evidence of truth, a proof of the absence of all guile. False miracles, miracles which need the manipulation of the performer, never stand thus clear of all possible collusion and deceit. But here there is no room for deceit, or question of it; the strong man has done


his work, and unless a stronger than he come and spoil him, his work will stand ; but here is one professing to be able to pluck his prey out of his hand. It is a fair trial of power, openly and honestly made, and the victor will stand confessed by every honest spectator. The dead man was known in his life time by all who are present, and if he comes forth at the bidding of Jesus they are prepared to recognise him, and are made, willing or unwilling, witnesses of the truth of the miracle.

VERSE 44. "And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes ; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go." Jesus has made His appeal to His heavenly Father, and now with the voice of authority He speaks to the dead ; but is it a voice of power enough to pierce the dull cold ear of death ? "And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot, with grave clothes ;" Heaven has heard the appeal, and death has heard a voice of power not to be resisted. Death will hear that voice again, and its power will be manifested on a scale of awful magnificence, and all the dead, the dead of many, many generations will answer to its power. Of all the sights of Divine power which ever met human eyes, that will be the grandest. Who can even attempt to conceive its overwhelming majesty ? But every eye shall see it ; and he who was the sceptered monarch, and he who was the beggar on the dunghill, will stand side by side in the undistinguished simplicity of a common nature.

Infidelity has tried its hand at one of its feeble at-

tempts on the veracity of Scripture in the instance of the miracle before us. It has asked how can a man bound hand and foot come forth? The very slightest acquaintance with the nature of the tomb of Lazarus, combined with a spirit of candour and honesty, would have kept this objection from ever being heard of. The grave was probably a cave hollowed out of the rock a few feet from the ground, from which a man might slip down with the greatest possible ease, and that too however encumbered with grave clothes. Infidelity is hard put to it, when it must have resort to such weak arguments as these. And of a similar nature are mostly all the infidel arguments. It is the easiest thing in the world to start objections to any doctrine whether in theology or in science; but the objector's province is too easy to be very useful or very honourable. Doubts and questions may be raised which, in the present state of our knowledge, we find it impossible satisfactorily to answer; but the Scriptures as a whole, and the great leading facts of Scripture are too plain and too well established by historical testimony to be set aside or brought into serious question by any carping questions in respect of doctrines too deep for our full comprehension, or in respect to the conduct of the men and women brought under notice in the Scripture narrative. The humble and teachable and candid mind finds truth enough to satisfy it, and only mystery enough to keep it humble. "Then shall they know if they follow on to know the Lord."

VERSES 45, 46. "Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus



did, believed on Him. But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done." There were candid and teachable spectators present, and there were others on whom the miracle produced no good effect, but the opposite. Many "which had seen the things which Jesus did believed on Him," but some went to the Pharisees and told them "what things Jesus had done." The candid and the teachable, like Nicodemus, believed that no man could do the miracles which Jesus did—could do such a miracle as had been wrought before their eyes—unless God were with Him. They saw and believed, and though more blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed, they did not go without blessing, and the mighty power of God exhibited before their eyes at the grave of Lazarus would form a landmark in their remembrance for ever. And so would it to those who believed not—to the one a blessed remembrance overflowing with thanksgiving, to the other of regret and remorse, because they had neglected their day of merciful visitation. It is matter for bitter regret to a man when he has missed, though by no fault of his own, an opportunity of realising a great good, but which has probably now escaped him for ever; but this is easily borne compared with the remorse which broods over an opportunity which, had it been embraced, would have been the making of the man, but which, being wilfully overlooked and neglected, has left him hopeless and helpless for ever. Surely this is a worm that dieth not, and a fire that cannot be quenched; and whatever of further misery may be in store for the de-

spisers of the great salvation, this of itself will be a source of bitter sorrow, without a ray of hope to alleviate it.

The object of those who went to tell the Pharisees what had happened could not have been good: they knew the feeling of that self-righteous sect toward Christ, and in all probability were animated by the same feeling themselves. It is difficult to conceive of such a degree of malice, envy, hatred, that in place of being moved to relenting, was moved by such a deed as they had witnessed to a greater intensity, and to an energy of opposition which only blind malice could have been guilty of. They were professedly friends of Lazarus, but instead of rejoicing with those who did rejoice on his behalf, they turn the deed of mercy into a source of persecution against the author of it. What an unhappy state of mind was theirs, and how far from the possibility of true happiness. The exhibition which they make of what human nature is capable of is truly humbling; but, alas! many such exhibitions there have been in all ages, and many, very many, even to this good hour. Some speak of the Scripture representation of that nature as too gloomy and overcharged; but he lives to little purpose who has not seen and heard, who indeed does not daily see and hear, enough to verify to the full conviction of his mind the darkest features in which it is represented by the word of God. There is hardly a conceivable enormity, whether as against God or man, which cannot be confirmed and illustrated by the history of human nature; and but for the grace of God, the world would long ere now have sunk

under the weight of its own wickedness. Works of darkness and deeds of cruelty have been wrought on earth which cannot be read but with horror, and which could have been the fruit only of a nature awfully sunk from the original standing of that nature as it came from the hand of God, bearing His own holy likeness.

VERSES 47, 48. "Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we ? for this Man doeth many miracles. If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on Him : and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation." The report of the miracle had the effect which very probably the reporters had anticipated, it roused the chief priests and Pharisees to come together for mutual consultation what they should or could do to arrest the course of this new teacher, whose teaching was so adverse and so abhorrent to them. The reality and greatness of the miracles by which His character as a teacher come from God was supported and confirmed they could not deny, but that character they were determined not to admit. It is an awful supposition to make, but it is to be feared too true in regard to many of them, that in their hearts they were convinced of the truth of His mission from God. To say this, is just to say that they set themselves in wilful, deliberate antagonism to God. It is very true that every act of sin, and specially every deliberate act of sin, is an act of opposition to God ; but bad as this is, and dangerous as it is, it is a very different thing from an attempt to oppose and defeat the counsel of God, resolute to frustrate so far as man can the

purpose of God, knowing it the while to be the purpose of God. There is a daring here so monstrous that it brings the guilty parties into one category of rebellion with the devil and his angels. We fear that the act of direct rebellion against God, and of determined resistance to His purpose, of which the priests and Pharisees were guilty, when they put the bribe into the hands, and the lie into the mouths of the soldiers who watched the sepulchre of Jesus, was not the first act of the kind of which they had been guilty.

The purpose for which they were gathered together at this time was manifestly for no honest enquiry into the source of the many miracles which they could not deny that Jesus wrought ; or whether His doctrine was of such a nature as to infer a heavenly origin ; the one purpose was to consult how His course might be brought to an end, and Himself be so disposed of that His teaching should no longer put them to shame. "What do we, for this Man doeth many miracles ?" The salvo which they applied to their consciences was, that if they did not interfere, all would believe on Him, and that the consequence would be the utter ruin of their nation at the hand of the Romans. One wonders if they were able to deceive themselves with so transparently unfounded a cause of fear. Had it been His purpose to set Himself up as an earthly king, this would have no doubt brought Him, and the nation which would in that case have been all too ready to follow Him, into direct collision with the Romans. Had earthly royalty been His object, the rulers knew well, that despite anything they could do, the nation would have been at His back almost

as one man. Had He been earthly-minded enough for this, even they themselves would have made common cause with Him, and that unearthly heavenly doctrine which was their great ground of offence at Him, had never been heard of. But His kingdom was not of this world, and His life and doctrine all bore witness to that; and too so clearly and unmistakeably that the Roman Governor, with all his jealousy for the Roman sovereignty, found no fault in Him. If they were able to deceive themselves with the idea of His seeking an earthly kingdom, it is evident they were not able to impose it upon Pilate. But it was only a pretence which did not even impose upon themselves, but merely served as a blind or soporific to their own consciences. It is possible for men to cheat themselves for a time, and to sear their consciences, but the deceit will not last for ever, the light of the great day of manifestation will dispel every delusion, and that day will try every man's work of what sort it was.

VERSES 49, 50, 51, 52. "And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all. Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation: And not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." We read that Caiaphas was the high priest that year, and in another place we read of Annas and Caiaphas being

the high priests, a pregnant proof of the state of disorganisation and degradation into which the holy nation, the peculiar people, had fallen. By the law of God there could be but one high priest, and he once consecrated to God, was consecrated until death. But matters had come to this pass now, that the high priesthood was far more of a secular and political office than of a sacred and spiritual, and one high priest succeeded another even in the lifetime of his predecessor, just as it suited the interest or the caprice of the Roman governors, or rather their cupidity, as it was notorious that this office of God could be purchased by money. Deep decline had fallen upon the Jewish state, and the time of its complete overthrow was advancing fast. The language of Caiaphas to his fellow members of the great council is not very gracious nor complimentary, "Ye know nothing at all," as if he had said, What need is there for deliberation, the case is abundantly plain, one man must die that the whole nation perish not. There was no need to be more particular, he need not name the man, well did they all know whom he meant. Justice, righteousness and truth have no place here, they had not met to deliberate on character, but on doom, not to expiscate the desert of the man Christ Jesus, but how they could best get rid of Him and His teaching together.

It is expedient that one man should die as a scapegoat for the people. One man, not a man—some one, any one, that is not any one being a man, but one particular man, and he did not need to indicate whom he meant, there was but one man in the mind and thoughts of all to whom his words could apply. He spoke un-

der an influence of which at the time he was probably little thinking. Unworthy as he was of his place as high priest, yet he was made the organ of the Holy Ghost to enunciate a truth of unspeakable importance to the whole family of mankind. His thoughts ran upon the temporal deliverance of the Jewish family alone, the truth in the mind of the Spirit was the spiritual deliverance of the whole human family scattered throughout the whole world and throughout all time. This is no solitary instance of a carnal, worldly man being made the instrument of the Holy Spirit to declare truth of the deepest importance. Balaam could prophecy and desire, no doubt truly desire, to die the death of the righteous, if he could have only combined that with the wages of unrighteousness. And so Caiaphas could prophecy the expediency of the death of one man to save the nation from perishing. It was a carnal deliverance, a temporal safety which occupied the mind of Caiaphas, and filled it to the exclusion of every idea of a spiritual and eternal salvation, while the latter was the whole subject of the inspiring Spirit. And while the mind of Caiaphas in its expediency embraced only the Jewish nation, the Eternal Spirit embraced in His unrestricted love "all the children of God scattered abroad." No doubt his idea was that if Jesus should set up for an earthly sovereignty, he would be at once followed by the people, and that a hopeless insurrection against the Roman power would be the cause of the entire destruction of the nationality which yet remained to them. How little as a prophet he was in the mind of God, and stood in His counsel, was proved by the fact

that the unjust death which he proposed and advocated, was the immediate cause why judgment came upon them to the uttermost, and there was no remedy. His device hastened the very ruin which it was intended to avert.

VERSE 53. "Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put Him to death." From that day forth their one object was to put Him to death. It was not a new idea, but an old one taken up with a determined resolution, that, by means however foul mattered not, they would carry it out. If ever men ran upon the thick bosses of Jehovah's buckler, they did. Surely there were some hearts among them who recoiled from this resolution of heartless injustice. Was Nicodemus there? probably not; he was too well-known as a favourer of the Nazarene to be called into council with them. Or Joseph of Arimathea? again we say probably not; he was of another spirit altogether, he was an honourable councillor and could have no sympathy with those who thirsted for innocent blood. They want no enquiry into the nature of His doctrinal teaching, nor into the character of His life toward His disciples or toward the world; it is His blood they want, and they will not rest until they get it. No doubt many of them believed that in the course they were pursuing they were doing God service. This appears to be very evident from Christ's words spoken from the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do;" and also from Peter's address to the people on occasion of the cure of the lame man, "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it as

did also your rulers." But neither the words of Christ nor those of Peter, conceived as they are in general terms, can fairly be construed into a plea of mitigation of guilt in the case of every individual implicated in this deed of dark and atrocious guilt. In regard to all it could amount to no more than this, that their act of unrighteous judgment was mitigated to the extent that they knew not the supreme dignity of Him against whom it was discharged; not that it would not have been a guilty perversion of judgment against whomsoever it had been perpetrated. His known character of unblemished uprightness and benignity, aggravated the guilt, as did also the mighty deeds which attested His commission from heaven. But we fear there is no room to doubt but that there were some among them who, in a large measure, knew what they did; who had, who indeed must have had strong suspicion that they were not only persecuting innocence, but innocence in the person of one who was at the very least a messenger from heaven, if not the Lord of Glory Himself. It seems hard to charge upon any man a guilt so atrocious as this, yet we find Stephen, the first Christian martyr, charging upon the Jewish nation the guilt of being the betrayers and murderers of the Holy One and the Just without a word of mitigation on the ground of ignorance. From all which we gather, that while Peter in general terms admits the plea of ignorance, although it could not be extended to every individual, Stephen charges the murder of the Prince of Life on the whole nation, though we know that there were not a few who consented not to the counsel and deed of the priests and

rulers, though they were able to carry with them the ignorant and fanatic multitude. And in due time the voice of the rulers and of the priests prevailed.

VERSE 54. "Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews: but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with His disciples." The Lord Jesus was ever and in all circumstances a true and faithful servant of His Father. He always did those things which pleased Him. He would neither anticipate the time of His great sacrifice, nor do ought to delay its consummation. Though the time was near now, yet it was not fully come; and though he had a baptism to be baptized with, and was even straitened till it was accomplished, there was no impatience to hasten the time, but the exercise of a holy prudence, that all righteousness might be fulfilled in Him and by Him, and that even in Him as in all the brethren of the household of faith, patience might have its perfect work; in all things He was made like to His brethren, and in all things He fulfilled all righteousness that in all things He might be the perfect exemplar of His people, as well as at once their great High Priest and their atoning sacrifice. To avoid premature death the Lord had left Judea, and gone into the country beyond Jordan; to meet a call connected with the glory of God, He returned, and now when the call of duty was fulfilled that His death might not be precipitated, He again retires into seclusion till He should accomplish the days which yet must intervene till the time of His being offered up, and then He will stedfastly set His face to go up to Jerusalem.

VERSES, 55, 56, 57. "And the Jews' passover was nigh at hand : and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves. Then sought they for Jesus, and spake among themselves, as they stood in the temple, What think ye, that He will not come to the feast ? Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where He were, he should show it, that they might take Him." The Jews' passover was nigh at hand. It was the last passover which the Lord was to celebrate, it was indeed strictly speaking the last passover of all, for before the time of another celebration could come round, the type would be fulfilled in the death of the antitype, the true Paschal Lamb would be slain ; and while the significance of the type would remain, its virtue and efficacy, whatever these may have been, would be found only in the antitype, but would be found there in vastly augmented power and energy. Christ, our passover, has been sacrificed for us.

"Many went out of the country up to Jerusalem, before the passover to purify themselves : " perhaps because they had a vow, or perhaps because they were under some ceremonial uncleanness. There are many who imitate this example so far as the difference of circumstances will permit in regard to our Christian passover. Regarding it with a kind of superstitious reverence (with too much of a true and godly reverence it cannot be regarded), they abstain from gross sin about the time of its celebration—sin to which they are addicted, and from which they separate themselves only for a brief season, before and

after. They forget that with the love of their sin in their heart, their approach to the Lord at His table is a mockery on their part, and an abomination in His sight—"Who hath required this at your hands to tread my courts." Godly humiliation and sorrow for past sin is altogether a different thing, accompanied as such sorrow ever is with heart hatred of sin, and with resolves formed in dependence on the aid of the Holy Spirit, against all sin as the abominable thing which the Lord hateth. But how many go to the Lord's table without even the decent formality of any preparation whatever—their whole life is a mere profession belied by the whole conduct of the life.

"Then sought they for Jesus, and wondered among themselves whether He would come to the feast." The people no doubt knew of the order issued against Him, and against all who knew where He was and concealed their knowledge; this would excite their doubt whether He would dare to appear again in Jerusalem. They knew not how little influence the fear of man could have upon His stedfast spirit. A victim devoted from His conception, yes even in Eternal council, to satisfy the offended majesty of the divine justice for the guilt of men, in whose room He the sinless One stood, and ready with an infinite willingness to pay, when the fulness of time was come, the debt which he had undertaken, even to the very uttermost farthing. He would not, just because He could not, draw back. It was in a perfect fulness of knowledge, of all that He had to endure, of the bitterness, to man inconceivable, of the cup of wrath against sin which He had undertaken to drain to its very dregs;

it was in the full knowledge of all this, that He said, "I come to do Thy will, O God, yea Thy law is within My heart." He will do nothing to precipitate, even as He will do nothing to prorogate, the day when all that was written concerning Him should be fulfilled.

The first promised coming of the Son of Man, though it was a coming in lowliness and abasement, a coming to suffer and to die, has been accomplished to the very letter; and now He has gone into heaven, has returned to Him who sent Him, until the time of the restitution of all things. His second promised coming will be the opposite of all this; it will be without sin unto salvation; it will be in the glory of the Father, and all the holy angels with Him, and then will He sit upon the throne of His glory. Every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him, and before Him shall be gathered all nations; eternal awards are His absolute divine prerogative. His first coming, abased and suffering unto death, secures in the justice and righteousness of God His second coming. He who will render to every man according to his deeds, will surely render to Christ the Son of Man, the fellow of Jehovah, the glory that is due to the greatest deed of God glorification which ever was or probably ever will be done.

May the spirit of the beloved disciple be ours, "Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus." And again, Amen.

HEAVEN.

HEAVEN.

WE are accustomed, and no doubt justly, to associate all possible ideas of consummate happiness with the idea of heaven ; while there are no doubt forms of happiness there, of which we are as yet unable to entertain the conception. For while there can be little doubt but that the remarkable prophecy of Isaiah, quoted by the Apostle in writing to the Corinthians, " Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him," has its primary application to the full revelation of the Gospel of the grace of God, still we can as little doubt that they are entirely applicable to the fulness of joy which is at God's right hand for evermore. Without anything like a detailed description of what heaven is, there are sufficient notices of it in Scripture to make us glad at the thought of soon being there—in truth, the great end in the purpose of God of our being here, is that we may at last be there, and there for ever. But if we regard the conduct of the generality of men, do we not see it justifying the language of the Psalmist, " Their inward thought is that their houses shall con-

tinue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations, they call their lands after their own names?" Thus the heavenly heritage is despised and neglected, and the better and enduring substance is bartered for the possession of a day; while the pleasures which perish in the using, hide from their eyes the pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore.

We have a negative description of heaven in the words, "They shall hunger no more neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat;" the latter part of which would be more appreciated by the inhabitants of those countries where sometimes the heat of the sun is as the heat of an oven than by us in our temperate climate. Of the same negative character are the following—"There shall be no night there," and "There shall be no more sea;" while we have a description of a positive character in the words—"His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads." It will be found that the negative descriptions are such as to exclude everything in the shape of evil; while the positive include all that we can conceive of happiness, and doubtless much more than we have as yet faculties to comprehend—happiness which it is not possible for a man to utter, nor for men to conceive or apprehend though it were uttered.

Let us gather up and consider the negative descriptions first; they are more within the sphere of our comprehension than the other, because they are more level with our experience. Taking the two last chapters of the book of the Revelation made to St. John,

in Patmos, for our guide, we find first "There was no more sea." Looking at the sea as the source of a manifold supply of food for the use of man, and regarding it as the great highway for the comparatively easy intercourse of nations, its loss would be not a little missed by men in man's presently constituted state. But the resurrection body shall need no such gross material sustenance, and of the locomotive power of the spiritual body we may form some conception from the instance recorded by Daniel; he had been engaged in confessing his sin, and the sin of his people, and in praying for the restoration of Jerusalem, and even while he was yet speaking in prayer, the angel Gabriel was with him and told him, "At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee." Wherever the seat of heaven is, in whatever distant region of infinite space, from thence, from the high metropolis of existence, from the very throne of God, within the brief space of a few minutes of time, Gabriel, the heavenly servant of God, is fulfilling his errand to Daniel, the earthly servant. But though the Divine Beneficence has made the sea to us a blessing, yet, like all our blessings, it bears the marks of the curse, because it bears the taint of sin. And so we read that "the sea shall give up its dead." Alas, what family on earth has not a member, a relative, or a friend, whose body is awaiting its resurrection from the sea. What treasures has not the deep swallowed up? how many loving hearts has it severed? how many has it broken? But its object, or rather the object of Him who made it, is now accomplished—"there is no

more sea ;" its beneficence is no more needed, and its instrumentality of earthly doom, as a source of death, is accomplished—there shall be no more sea.

"And there shall be no more death." What the Holy Ghost promised by the mouth of the Apostle is accomplished—"The last enemy shall be destroyed, death." It is a most unhappy rendering which our translators give of the Apostle's words when they render them "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death ;" according to which reading there might be more enemies left behind, but after death was destroyed, the others would be suffered to remain.* The meaning of the Spirit manifestly being, that every enemy shall be destroyed—the last of all being death. Death has been quaintly but truly called the king of terrors, and the terror of kings. The war with death is the war in which there is no discharge, for "it is appointed unto men once to die." Sin was, to man at least, the cause of death—"In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." The prohibition of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil under the penalty of death, was in itself an implied promise of life on obedience ; and besides this, the guarantee of life stood hard by in the life maintaining fruit of the tree of life. Obedience and life, disobedience and death, were thus written in characters about which there was no room for hesitation or doubt. The melancholy result we all know and feel, for death hath "passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." And the penalty was not corporal only, but spiritual also ; in truth, in the very first act of sin,

* See Campbell on the Gospels, Preliminary Essays.

and by that first act the soul died. A restoration that is to avail us must meet the penalty as respects both soul and body, and specially as respects the soul. The engagement of Christ has accomplished this, for in regard to His people He hath in every view of it "abolished death." The record of death's doings is like the roll of Ezekiel, "written within and without, and written therein lamentations and mourning and woe." How many desolate hearths is not death daily making, and hearts still more desolate but for the blessed hope; our friend sleepeth, but the Lord will come to awake him out of sleep, and then neither he nor we shall sleep any more, the activity of immortality needs no repose.

In one of Lord Byron's letters to a correspondent, he says, "*I feel* that I exist now, and *I fear* that I may exist hereafter" (the italics are ours). Can anything be conceived more miserable than this? It is not the fear of death, for the life he led made existence a burden, and the thought of death welcome, but the fear of immortality. Yes, God's vicegerent, the conscience, may be overborne long, but it cannot be utterly extinguished. What a difference between the like of this and the assured hope of the Christian, that because Christ lives, he shall live also. What a difference between the "I fear I may exist hereafter," and the jubilant hope of the Apostle, which belongs to every Christian, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." And now at the restitution of all things, "there shall be no more death." In the one innumerable family

of God no breach shall ever be made ; there shall be no hiding of the Father's face from any of the children, and Christ will never say to them, " It is expedient for you that I go away." Neither shall any cloud of jealousy or distrust come between any of the members of the happy and trusting and loving brotherhood. Death cannot enter there ; and it shall never cast its shadow there. Sleep, the image of death, is not needed there. There is no more painful or humiliating sight in this world, full as it is of sad and heartbreaking scenes, than that of a man whom God has richly endowed with health and wealth, and high intelligence, thereby putting within his reach all the sinless enjoyments of this world, both intellectual and physical, and at the same time the capability of blessing many around him ; yet so squandering and abusing all these good gifts of God, and for which God will yet call him to account, as neither to glorify God nor benefit man, but to exhaust the cup of sensual pleasure to his own utter disgust of the present life, and to his fear and dread of a life to come. Poor Byron's experience is, alas, not singular ; nor Colonel Gardener's before his conversion—when for fear of the great future he wished he had been a dog in order to be free of his responsibility. Worldly and sensual pleasures satiate, but never satisfy.

" Neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain." There shall be no night of sorrowing watchfulness, no night of weeping there. Tears, the ensigns of grief, are never shed there, for there is no grief to draw them out, and there is no pain to turn hours into days, and days into long weary years.

The inhabitant shall never be heard to say, I am sick. Notwithstanding the truth, that in the unspeakable benevolence, mercy, and grace of God, the seasons of health, enjoyment or comfort, are even here greatly predominant, yet the sources of sorrow, and the avenues by which it reaches us are exceeding many. Who, amid the scenes of sorrow all around him, will dare to say, "My mountain stands strong, I shall never be moved," or with the rich fool in the parable, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." In this world we need sorrow, and so, "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth;" the sorrows of the wicked also abound, but these are never spoken of as Fatherly chastisements, a very different character attaches to them, they are the Lord's just judgments upon the workers of iniquity. God putteth the tears of His people into His bottle, and their sighs are in His book; for a precious end God caused them; they work a gracious and therefore a precious result, and they are treasured up by Him in whose sight His people's death is precious. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all." Here there are pains of body to be endured, and often pain of heart—a heavier burden still; but to God's people they are healing medicines, even when they are sent as the chastisement of sin. Witness the case of God's dealing with David. To them there is balm in Gilead; "though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies." And now God's object in them is accomplished; the believing soul has drunk the bitter

cup, and he has found that it was indeed a healing medicine, and he shall no more drink it again ; all that is past, and out of the full and abiding rivers of pleasures, he shall drink for evermore.

“ There shall be no night there ”—there where the redeemed of the Lord are ever with the Lord. Night is the season of darkness, and if a man walk in the night he stumbleth ; it is the season when the workers of iniquity are busiest—breaking into houses which they could only mark for themselves in the day time ; it is the season for unfounded and for well founded alarms ; it is the season for the adulterer as well as for the thief—both of them thieves, and the first by far the worst of the two, each anxious to screen himself from the eye of man, careless of the truth, “ Thou God seest me.” But night is not only the season for material darkness, danger, and discomfort ; it is emblematical of all these spiritually ; and of all that it is in reality here, and of all that it is symbolical to the soul, the declaration “ no night there ” assures us of the absence in heaven for ever. There shall be no night upon the soul ; that which brings night over our spirits here is the deep sense of sin when unaccompanied with a clear apprehension of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, and of a comfortable hope of our interest in it. But when “ the Lord God giveth them light,” and when they are transformed into Christ’s likeness by “ seeing Him as He is,” then the night is passed for ever, and it is everlasting joy that has come with the morning. To the hearts of the brethren of Christ, there is no darkness so deep, no gloom so heavy, as the want of light from the face of God ; to Jesus Him-

self this was the source of His great sorrow ; the forsaking of the multitudes which had at one time followed Him, even the forsaking of His nearest and dearest on earth was nothing to this ; while under this, even His spirit was sorely troubled, till its anguish broke forth in words which will never be forgotten while a redeemed soul lives to remember them, " My God ! my God ! why hast Thou forsaken Me ? " But His deep sorrow delivered His people from suffering more than the obscuration of a passing cloud, and secured for them a place in the city of habitation, and " there is no night there." " Ye now have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your joy no man taketh from you." " They hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more." No doubt this applies to the materialism by which the body is sustained, while its higher application will be found to confirm Christ's promise, " Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled"—that is, they shall be holy as the Lord their God is holy—not that they shall be holy in extent and intensity as God, for " there is none holy as the Lord." They shall be perfect in creature holiness, but to the immeasurable uncreated holiness of God no creature can ever reach. Angels sinned and fell, man sinned and fell, but " the just God cannot commit iniquity ; " yet the holiness to which man shall attain, the likeness and conformity to God which the men, the brethren of Christ, shall reach, will be to them a source of such true and intense enjoyment, as we can yet form but little idea of. What was it that sustained the martyr at the stake ? that sustained the exile in his Patmos ?

that sustained the witnesses for Christ when, for His sake, they were "destitute, afflicted, tormented?" was it not their assured faith in the goodness of their cause? was it not their conviction that they were testifying for Christ, and for the truth as it is in Jesus? and if this measure of likeness to the Lord could sustain trials, which in mere idea make the flesh to creep upon the bones, what must be the enjoyment of being like Him when we see Him as He is, and that too in the absence of every element of sorrow, and in the presence and possession of every element of true enjoyment?

"And there shall in no wise enter into (the city) any thing that defileth." Sin once broke out in heaven itself, but it was cast out and for ever; it shall never break out there again; neither shall it ever be able to break in. Could sin enter, the very dread of it would be the source of an anxiety inconsistent with perfect security the guarantee of perfect peace. "Holiness becometh Thine house for ever." And so there is not only no sin, but perfect creature holiness—we say creature holiness because, as already said, absolute essential holiness is the prerogative of God alone, but the purpose of God who changeth not, is a security for the creature absolute and eternal.

And now to regard for a little the positive aspect under which heaven is presented to us; we pass by the descriptions of the city of God which are drawn from images of material grandeur—and this, not as despising them, or as holding them of small account, but because we prefer to occupy our brief space in considering, so far as we are able, the spiritual representations of the place, its occupants and its service.

The material images are all drawn from the best and most prized of earth's possessions, and thus at least, they lead to the very utmost conceptions of glory and beauty as the adornments of the place where God's honour dwelleth. Such is the place of the occupancy of holy angels and of the redeemed of the Lord—such the place of their service.

For "His servants shall serve Him." Those servants of God who, by reason of the infirmities of age or bodily weakness, are weary *in* but not *of* God's service, shall find a renewal of it under happier auspices in themselves and in the circumstances around them. So widely different is the estate there from the estate here, and so very different, not only the scene, but also the society, that we can form but the faintest possible conceptions of the service itself. Here it partly consists in praise and thanksgiving, in giving to the Lord the glory due unto His name, and there too, doubtless, that will for ever form part of the service—"And a voice came out of the throne saying, Praise our God all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." And so it ever will be. But here, much of our service consists in striving against sin in ourselves, in subduing the body and the fleshly lusts which war against the soul, and in *fighting* the good fight of faith. And then there is the service for Christ among our fellowmen, seeking to win them to Christ, desiring to be God's instruments in conferring on them the

very highest and best of all boons. In this latter particularly it is that we are called to be fellow-workers together with God. We have no reason to believe that in any of these ways shall we be called to serve in heaven. In ourselves there will be no flesh lusting against the spirit ; nothing in ourselves on which temptation could fasten, but also nothing to tempt—for surely there shall be nothing to hurt or to destroy in all that holy mountain of God. All the more should we now occupy till the Lord come ; all the more approve ourselves to God in that sphere of service which we have reason to expect will be closed against us for ever there.

But though the service of Christ's people here lies in its highest phase, even as Christ's own did, in ministering to the spiritual needs of men withering and dying under the blight of sin ; yet it has a temporal and corporal aspect too. Christ's service to the Father embraced both, and the service of His people to Christ must embrace both also. Feeding the hungry and healing the sick was, in the course of His ministry, Christ's daily work, as well as proclaiming the kingdom of God and fulfilling all righteousness. The importance of even this lower aspect of the duty which we owe to God will not be lightly thought of by those who remember the solemn anticipative representation of the coming judgment, which has been recorded by the Holy Ghost for our instruction, encouragement and warning. This, too, is a service for which there shall be no need in heaven, for there they hunger no more, and not one of all its inhabitants shall ever say I am sick. The peacemaker's office, also,

shall have ceased, for in the house of the Father there shall be no estrangement for any cause whatever among the brethren. Even the Great Peacemaker's office is done; and its glorious and blessed effect will be seen in the great multitude, which no man can number, clothed in garments washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. The office of the Great Comforter, also, so far as it was an office of mere comfort, will cease—because it will be needed no more; yet as the spirit of revelation, the Holy Ghost, may for aught we know, retain this function for ever. But “secret things belong unto the Lord our God,” and our duty and our interest meanwhile lie in humble trust and full acquiescence in the will of our most gracious and loving Father.

“His servants shall serve Him, *and they shall see His face.*” To see the king's face is among all nations a term expressive of the highest honour; it was and is peculiarly so among the oriental nations. It implied nearness and readiness of access to the king, and as great a degree of friendship as could subsist between parties so different in worldly rank. The inferior in rank might be, and doubtless often was, the superior in that which was best of all—namely, moral worth—and thereby conferred more honour than he acquired. Amongst earthly kings there are both differences of character and differences of rank; but the King, whose face we, if we are believers, are to see, is in rank supreme, and in character one with the holiest of all. He is the Prince of the kings of the earth, by whom kings reign and princes decree justice; the one who never did sin, and in whose mouth guile was

never found. His face it is true honour to see; and then it is lasting. Caprice may soon change the earthly king's countenance toward his chief favourite, or, as in the case of Haman, the king may first become his accomplice, and then the author of his degradation and ruin; and even taking things at the very best, the favourite is mortally smitten, and what can the king's face do for him then? or the king himself dies and leaves his friend to the chance of favour, or the greater chance of disfavour, of his successor. But none of all these things can happen to him who sees our King's face. With Him there is no caprice,—"Whom He loveth, He loveth to the end;" and then he never dies, and He has given to them eternal life, and they abide with Him for ever.

"His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face, and *His name shall be in their foreheads.*" There can be no doubt but the name in the forehead marks the proprietorship of the whole redeemed family—"I have redeemed them, they are Mine." May there be any connection between the name on the forehead common to all, and the white stone with the "new name" written thereon, bestowed on each, and peculiar to each, but known only to the happy possessor? We do not as yet know; may we come to know by-and-bye. By the one the relation of the bearer to God and His universe is openly displayed; by the other the special relation between God and the possessor is betokened, and perhaps in a measure instrumentally maintained; but here we are speaking of what not only hath the eye not seen, but of what probably human language is incapable of conveying,

and the human heart as yet is incapable of receiving. "Here we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face." Meantime we are all satisfied of this, that every Christian should bear his Master's name in his forehead, as well as carry it in his hand as it were by a certificate of baptism. Born in a land which passes under the Christian name, as acknowledging Christ's headship over the nations, as well as His headship (though in another character) over the Church, all are by courtesy Christians; and there are but few even of those who repudiate Christ who are very willing to repudiate the name. In other words, there are but few who are ready to avow their rejection of allegiance to Christ; and, thanks be to God, they are the few indeed who in this matter dare to glory in their shame. Sad it is to think that though few, some there are who do glory in this their shame, and among them, saddest of all, to find women sinking all the finer instincts of their nature, and banding themselves with men who pretend to interpret nature, but who can find no God of nature. Who can look abroad upon the innumerable and marvellous adaptations which bespeak a wisdom and a power far beyond the reach of creature intelligence and creature might, and find nothing but a dreary blank—an unintelligent and unintelligible chance. Who would like to find a mother, or a sister, or a wife, from out of the ranks of this dark and dreary and hopeless sisterhood? The man who can be content with the creed, or rather the no creed of a fatherless world, is a monster in creation. But language has no word by which to characterize the woman who says there is no God. What a con-

trast between such an one, and those holy and loving women who followed Christ in the days of His flesh ministering to Him, who accompanied Him even to the cross, and whose love drew them to His sepulchre where their hopes lay buried with Him, till the joyful conviction of His resurrection dispelled their past sorrows, and filled them anew with light and life. Who could make a partner of a woman who had neither wish nor hope beyond a present life, and who saw in her partner only an animated piece of dust—a chance formation soon to return to its original nothingness, and be as if it had never been. Could love exist under such a creed, if in any measure it really did, it would give the lie to the creed, and convict its holder of falsehood. The woman of the lands of heathendom will rise in the judgment against the woman who, rejecting the light of revelation, loved the darkness rather than the light, and let her own conscience say why.

But in what manner do we avow our attachment to Christ? Surely it is not by merely retaining the name. Some, yes many, retain the name who can interlard their ordinary discourse with it, as if it were a mere expletive for giving point to a sentence, or adding flavour and intensity to a jest. Christ is often sadly wounded in this matter, not in the house of His friends, for friends they are not, and their whole life and conduct betrays their utter indifference to His honour and to any interest in Him. By courtesy they are called Christians, and of a worldly courtesy which has no relation to Christ, they are willing to bear the name, if you will only not identify them too

closely with Him, His interests, or His people. That would be a humiliation to which they will not submit, and which by their whole course of life, they take care shall not befall them. It is decent and respectable to be a Christian in name, but it would be fanatical to be a Christian in deed and in truth. We would be sorry to brand the man who lets an unguarded oath, or a profane use of the name of Christ escape his lips as unchristian ; but without any hesitation we affirm that the man who has felt sin in some measure as the Psalmist felt it, when because of it the poison of God's arrows drunk up his spirit, and has found peace with God and enlargement of spirit toward God, in that only name given under heaven amongst men whereby we must be saved, will never let that name escape his lips in idle frivolity, nor name it but with reverence and godly fear. Of all the sins which God's people of old committed against Him, there was none more hateful in His sight than idolatry, and in our day and land of light, no sin approaches more closely to literal idolatry, than that of profane swearing. The old idolatry turned away from God, and put upon him the dishonour of being forsaken for vanities existing only in the imagination of the deluded votary ; but the profane use of God's name seems to us as if possible more dishonouring to God—as much more dishonouring as contemning and despising is harder to be borne than mere forsaking. God's Spirit, by the Prophet, speaks of that “great and dreadful name, Jehovah, our God ;” and that is the name which the fools who make a mock of sin dare to ridicule, or so to use as to intensify their words

of speech, and give a keener edge whether to their wrath or to their pleasantry.

What congruity can there be between a life like this on earth, and the life which is led in heaven. And as there is no congruity between the two; so there can be no preparation in the one for the other; and what then can the end of such a life be? No peace made with God; no friendship established with Him; but the old enmity subsisting in augmented power, and no more sacrifice for sin to do it away. For it is *now* that is the accepted time, and *now* that is the day of salvation, therefore let us (while yet we may) accept Him who, having made peace by the blood of His cross, will be our peace, and then whether present or absent we shall be accepted of Him to His eternal praise and our eternal well-being.

How truly do men in forsaking God, forsake their own mercies? Even apart from the great future, with all its solemn and eternal realities, they miss all the true happiness, all the solid enjoyment of the present. Pleasure they may have, for did sin carry no pleasure with it, it is hard to conceive how men could be contented to live in sin. But it is pleasure of the lowest and basest character, degrading to a rational and immortal nature; and how evanescent it is; how surely followed by seasons (far longer than the seasons of enjoyment) of depression and despondency, and not very unfrequently of despair. Well has the Spirit of God characterised it as like to the crackling of thorns under a pot, a momentary blaze and gone, quenched before the pot can feel the blaze. It is a wise dispensation of the Divine Providence that so it should

be ; for if even as matters now stand, we find men justifying the indulgence of their passions on the ground that their passions are part and parcel of that nature with which God has endowed them, and that therefore the indulgence of them cannot be very criminal ; how would a continued impunity tend to confirm them in their course of evil ? They forget that a human element has been thrown into the nature which at first bore the stamp of Divine workmanship and of Divine likeness—and this was not God's doing, but man's. Real enjoyment can never be found while the creature walks contrary to God ; but on the other hand, at peace and in friendship with God, men may endure the loss of all things and yet be happy. They know that there is enough in the future to compensate all, and far more than all temporal loss. It is indeed a blessed truth, that "the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

That is a remarkable passage in the book of revealed truth wherein the apostle Paul comes to visions and revelations of the Lord. Perhaps no man was ever privileged to see and hear so much of the glory that is to be revealed as was the apostle Paul. Moses saw, in the mount of Sinai, the glory reflected from the presence of the Lord so powerfully as to make his own face to shine with a brightness on which his fellows could not look till it was shrouded with a vail ; yet the glory he saw was so tempered that in the body, and knowing himself to be in the body, he could look upon it and live. The vision which John saw in Patmos, while he was in the spirit on the Lord's day,

was excellent and glorious, but it was such a glory as it was neither impossible nor unlawful for a man to utter. Something far more glorious would seem to have been that vision disclosed in the third heaven to him who was so transported by the glory that he could not tell, either at the time or afterwards, whether he was in the body or out of it, while he looked upon it. We believe that such is the glory that is to be revealed, that were it disclosed to us now here on earth, and were our frail nature strengthened and invigorated so as to be able to sustain the sight, we should, unless a very large measure of the grace of patience were shed upon us by the Holy Spirit, be utterly unfitted for the duties of the present life, and our lives would be filled up with a longing to get away from the clouds and darkness, from the cares and trials, from the sins and sorrows, from the fightings without and the fears within, which mingle so largely in the experience of even God's people here below. "Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest," would be the breathing of the believing soul, not merely at intervals of peculiar sorrow and depression, but would express the constant feeling of the renewed heart, though always in humble but cheerful acquiescence in the will of God. "My soul longeth, yea even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord." Whether the Apostle's expressed desire to depart and to be with Christ as far better than any possible condition of earthly happiness was made before or after his vision of heavenly blessedness, it would not be easy if even possible to determine. We are inclined to believe that the desire followed rather

than preceded the vision ; and if so, it goes far to corroborate our conviction that, constituted as the human nature now is, a full revelation of the glory to come could either not be sustained, or if it could, would draw the human spirit thitherward with a power which would be wholly inconsistent with the patience wherewith the brethren of Christ should possess their souls. But even the human spirit when emancipated from the body of sin and death, and clothed upon with the house which is from heaven, will be fully able to sustain even the exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The Apostle knew better than perhaps any other man ever did what the weight of glory meant, and what the splendour of the crown of righteousness which awaited him on his departing to be with the Lord, and hence his patient abiding in the flesh, because it was more needful for the Church, was the more signally and the more honorably manifested.

“ And now, O Father, glorify thou Me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.” Are not these words the breathings of a soul longing after God, of a soul thirsting for God, for the living God ? But they are the words of One who knew what He was longing for, what He was thirsting after ; not an unknown glory, not an inexperienced blessedness, but a glory possessed before the world was. It is not for us even to attempt to understand that great mystery of godliness—“ God manifest in the flesh,” or to draw the line in respect of knowledge, between what is proper to the Divinity and what to the humanity in the one person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Such knowledge is far too high


for us, but it is in the flesh that we hear the Lord praying for the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. Even with all His stedfastness of purpose to finish the work which the Father had given Him to do, the glory and the blessedness of the Father's house lay very near to His heart, and we may well believe that nothing but the completion of His redeeming work could have kept Him for an hour in this sin-stricken, and by sin exiled world. But His Father's glory was concerned in His finishing of the work which with His own full consent had been given to Him to do; and though this is a lesser matter than the glory of God, the redemption of humanity depended wholly upon it. Before the mind of the Lord Jesus there lay, disclosed with perfect clearness, suffering which mere humanity could not endure, and which tried hard even His sinless Divinely sustained humanity, that was one side of the picture; and the other side contained the vision of the joy unspeakable and full of glory, the abiding condition of the Father's house, and of the Father's presence. But from the Father's work, from the redemption of sinners, He never swerved, never ceased till from the cross He could proclaim a finished salvation, and commit His spirit into His Father's hands. For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame, but He believed and did not make haste, and so in due time was fulfilled all that was written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms concerning Him.

Let us in humble imitation of His example, and following His footsteps, though afar off, possess our souls

in patience waiting for the appearing of the great God, our Saviour Jesus Christ. It is indeed true that there are troubles and afflictions enough so far to wean the heart from this world, and to make all who have faith in Christ as the resurrection and the life, regard it as the scene of a transient pilgrimage, yet let us bless God that He makes it so enjoyable a place, and its pleasures so many, that even God's people can live in it with such a degree of comfort and satisfaction as to enable them to wait God's time for a change to a better world. With Job they can say, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come." Much more of evil would make the world almost an unendurable habitation to God's people; and while the tendency of evil is to grow in intensity and to propagate itself, God in His wisdom and in His providence so orders that the swelling tide is either driven back, or at the least restrained, "bloody and deceitful—men shall not live out half their days." "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee, the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain." "Because thy rage against Me, and Thy tumult is come up into Mine ears, therefore I will put My hook in thy nose, and My bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest." How often the Lord has dealt thus with His enemies, and the enemies of His people we may never know; but we believe that, in a more or less extended sense of the words, they embody the Lord's dealing with the wicked every day; and that the Lord's people do daily, though often all unconsciously, experience the

benefit of it. The fear of death is natural to all men as sinners, and is more or less of restraint on all, but the brethren of Christ are delivered from it; so completely delivered in the instance of many of them, that they have even need of patience to moderate and to bring into complete submission to the will of God, their desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is indeed far better. These instances prove how true it is that "Christ hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel." And if such longings are found in some of God's people amid our comparative ignorance of the blessedness of the dead who die in the Lord, what would be the state of feeling in every child of God were the things revealed which now we see through a glass darkly, even the things which as yet it is not possible for a man to utter, nor for the mind of man to comprehend.

On God's part wisely hidden, let us on our part justify God, in patience possessing our souls. Amen.



NAAMAN THE SYRIAN.



NAAMAN THE SYRIAN.

"Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria; he was also a mighty man in valour; but he was a leper."—
2 Kings v. 1.

THE story of Naaman the Syrian is at once deeply interesting and richly instructive. The history, so far as it is recorded for us in the page of inspiration, of the converts from heathenism, whether written in the pages of the Old Testament or of the New, is highly illustrative of God's sovereignty; and the strength and docility of their faith, read us, in our happier circumstances, a lesson of humility and of gratitude to Him who has cast our lot so much more auspiciously than theirs. Their faith, great in itself, stands out with marvellous brightness, from the dark background of a heathen birth and a heathen up-bringing. Such examples of faith under conditions so little favourable to its very existence, and still less to such a noble development of it, cannot, if honestly regarded by us, fail to stir us up to persevering prayer for an increase of faith, and provoke us to love and to good works. The course of these heathen converts began at the furthest possible remove from God

and truth, even from the darkness and degradation of lords many and gods many; yet even in this world they attained to a high degree in the faith that is in Christ Jesus, became indeed ensamples of faith, and having begun their course at the remotest distance from Christ, went from strength to strength, and will no doubt appear in the kingdom of God, examples and monuments of the truth of Christ's word, "The last shall be first, and the first last."

Naaman had attained a rank and standing among his countrymen, enough we may believe to make, if not himself at least his position an object of envy to many. He was in high favour with his master the king of Syria, and he was honourable in the eyes of the people, because he had been the instrument whereby the Lord had wrought deliverance for Syria. It is the inspired man who ascribes the deliverance to the Lord; no doubt the king and the people and he himself, if they looked at all beyond the prowess of the arm of flesh, would ascribe the honour and give the thanks to their idol god Rimmon. The sequel of Naaman's history proves how justly the honour is ascribed to Jehovah the God of Israel, the God of the whole earth. This man excelled in a quality which has ever stood in high repute among heathen nations, and among ignorant and foolish men, namely valour, not we may presume the unpretending courage which is the fruit of a well regulated, but the brutal courage of an ignorant and unreflecting, mind. Yet, notwithstanding all that was about him to attract and to dazzle the eye which is filled with the things of this world, there was in his lot, as there is in every

lot of earth, a but ; he was great and honourable, "*but* he was a leper." Leprosy was a loathsome disease, and incurable by art of man ; during a certain period of its course it was so loathsome and contagious that the unhappy subject of it was sequestered so far as was possible from all human intercourse. After a time if it did not produce death, it lost its contagious character, and was only an unseemly object to the human eye. At this stage it seems to have arrived with Naaman.

How true it is, how universally true, "the heart knoweth its own bitterness." A smiling countenance is not always the index of a joyous heart, or even of a heart at ease. Did the poor man, and specially the poor godly man, know what was passing in the lordly mansion, and in the heart of its owner, he would not envy the magnate, nor covet his outwardly splendid estate. But while envy and covetousness are forbidden by God to all, the poor godly man is of all men under the least temptation to these sins. He knows that the reversion of an estate truly great belongs to him ; an estate of which no peradventure can deprive him, over which the curse of sin can never pass, and with which no *but* can mingle. He would dishonour his heavenly Father by looking with envy on the best of the estates of earth, for they are not only defective in point of duration, but bear the marks of the serpent's trail. "The things which are seen are temporal," all of them ; and if it can be said of affliction that it is but for a moment, though affliction does make the hours drag heavily, much more is it true of the enjoyments of time ; if they are mere earthly enjoy-

ments, they perish in the very using. Truly the fashion of this world passeth away, and this is a fatal *but* to all its seeming goodliness, because the glorious beauty is a fading flower, while to the brethren of Christ there is reserved a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

VERSES 2, 3. "And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." What a wonderful record will be the history of grace when read in the light of heaven, a light which will throw meaning and fitness and propriety upon every obscure act of God's providence, and illustrate beyond all our present possible conceptions Christ's promise, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." Bands of Syrians had made incursions into the land of Israel, and had carried captive a little maid, and probably others beside her; but if so, while they were equally known to the inspiring Spirit, they have no place in the inspired record, for good cause no doubt though we know it not; sad it were if the reason was that they were unworthy because of their departure in heart from the Lord God of Israel, and of their following idols. Not a few of the Lord's chosen people had fallen into this foolish and guilty course, and this was the chief procuring cause of their being dispersed among the nations far and near. God however cured them at length of their idolatry by the Babylonish captivity; yet it did not

cure them of their carnality and formalism, for long after it they filled up the measure of their guilt when they crucified the Lord of Glory. But the time is coming when that blood shall be upon Israel no longer as a burden of guilt binding them to punishment, but as the blood of cleansing, and as the seal of the returned favour and loving kindness of the Lord ; and in Him whom their fathers crucified shall all the seed of Israel rejoice, and in Him shall they glory. Then shall Israel blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with the fruits. May the Lord hasten the time.

The Lord directed in His providence the lot of the little captive maid into the household of Naaman. Her condition would seem to have been as easy and happy as the lot of a captive slave could well be ; her interest in her master's unhappy condition as a leper would seem to indicate so much. If our conjecture is correct, the kindness shown to this little servant of God was soon and abundantly recompensed, "with the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful." We have called her a servant of God, and that not altogether from the judgment of charity ; she not only knew about the true God, but could pray to Him and repose trust in Him ; she also knew about the prophet of the Lord, and had faith in his power as the servant of God, and yet further in his benevolence "he *would* recover him of his leprosy." There were many in the land of Israel who would not have spoken as the little maid did. Was she perhaps, or her parents (if she was too young at the time to be so spoken of) among the seven thousand in Israel whom

Jehovah had reserved to Himself who had not bowed the knee to Baal? At any rate in this little maid was exemplified the truth of God's promise, "Them that honour Me, I will honour." He justified her faith, and He honoured her as a link in the chain by which he was to draw Naaman to Himself, and for aught we can tell others again through his instrumentality, till perhaps not a few were brought to forsake dumb idols and serve the true and living God. It is a cheering thing to know that one poor humble believer may be the instrument in the hand of God of originating a work of grace in some poor brother's heart, who having received the light himself takes the torch and holds it out to another who, actuated by the same spirit, and following the same example becomes in turn the means of enlisting others into the train of the Lord's torchbearers. But, alas! the picture has a reverse, the evil that men do, as well as the good, lives after them. Who can tell the number of immortal souls which men like Hume and Voltaire and Byron have lured to destruction, and by their licentious and infidel writings are luring still? In the days of their mortal flesh they would have gloried in these as signal instances of their literary power; but how do they regard them now as one after another follows them to the place of banishment from God? We have the answer from the mouth of the rich man in the parable, who would fain have prevented his brethren from following him into the place of torment but could not. The motive which actuated this anxiety about his brethren, is a very doubtful one, and has been thought to proceed more from selfishness in regard to himself,

than from benevolent regard to his brethren. We are not fit judges in this matter, nor are we called at all to judge in it. We are, however, quite safe to conclude thus far, that if when we leave this world, we leave temptation and incentives to sin behind us, it will be wholly beyond our power to provide any corrective, and thus the effects of our guilt and folly may accumulate long after the mind which cogitated the evil is removed to another world, and when the hand that penned them has mouldered into dust. Let us be wise in time for there is no device nor wisdom in the grave.

VERSES 4, 5. "And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel. And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment." All the loving Saviour's people should be a loving people, and for the most part they are so. The history of the triumphs of Christian love is most honourable to the Gospel, and to the character of Christ. The instances which followed the introduction of the Gospel into the islands of the South Sea, wherein the lion was changed into a lamb, and wherein the ferocious warrior was turned into a humble and teachable disciple of Christ, are almost innumerable, and the whole aspect of the peoples furnished a theme of wonder and admiration, and of devout thanksgiving to God on the part of all who were witnesses of the marvellous change. The nameless (on earth nameless, we trust not in heaven) little maid of the house

of Israel manifested in her anxiety for her master's welfare the true spirit of a worshipper of the Lord God of Israel. It is when we love not in word nor in tongue only, but in deed and in truth, that "we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him." When we think of love being the very atmosphere of heaven, we wonder how cold and hard hearts could breathe in it, and conclude that a great change must pass over them before they can stand before Him who was and is and ever will be love incarnate. She could not cure, but she could direct her master to one who she believed could cure, and this is all that one fellow sinner can do for another. The redemption of the soul is precious, far too precious for any man to be able to give to God a ransom for him; but each can direct his guilty brother to One who is able to save, and what an additional power of persuasion must accompany our words if we are speaking that which we do know and testifying of that which we have seen. It is the emancipated slave whether in body or soul who can speak best as to the sweets of liberty, and strike the contrast between spiritual fetters, and liberty in the truth.

Report was soon made to Naaman of the words of the Israelitish maid. It is evident that young and stranger as she was, her strong conviction was not only not treated with contempt, but made a deep impression upon those who heard of it, and upon those to whom it was reported. Whether this arose from the knowledge which the surrounding heathen nations had, that there did exist in the land of Israel spiritual power which existed nowhere else,

or from the strong conviction which had evidently dictated the words, the impression was made and strongly made. The land of Israel was a Goshen in the midst of a dark and benighted world ; and if the people of Israel had been true to their high calling, had they been faithful to their witness-bearing for God, they would have maintained a rank among the nations, not merely for wisdom, but for power and dominion also, which would have made them in every respect the chief among the nations and the light of the world. But their unfaithfulness to God was of the darkest character, both in respect of guilt and folly, to such an excess indeed in respect of both that we find it difficult to conceive how they could have been so infatuated, how it was possible for them so to turn their glory into shame. But they did it time after time notwithstanding manifold and heavy chastisement for their abominable idolatry, and degraded themselves to the level of the heathen nations, and through a guilt which made the guilt of a heathen light in comparison with theirs. And our privileges are greater than were theirs, and the Saviour's warning carries a terrible emphasis when it is applied to us, "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee."

The king of Syria takes up the matter and does it in the usual style of Eastern despotism, "Go to, go, and I will send a letter." Between himself and his brother king of Israel, he regards the matter as good as done, that is if the prophet can do it. He had yet to learn that the prophet served a King who was no respecter of persons, and that unlike the heathen

priests of dumb idols, who could pander to power and to the bribery of wealth, the prophet of the Most High God was beyond the fear of man, and above the wealth of kings to bribe.

VERSES 6, 7. "And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me." In the letter written by the king of Syria to the king of Israel, so far as our record goes, there is not the very slightest reference to the prophet. No doubt the heathen king thought that the prophet of Israel was as much at the devotion and service of the king of Israel as his own heathen priests and soothsayers were at his. If he got a faithful record of his embassy, then he as well as his honourable servant got a lesson which ought to have done him good. The king of Israel, to whom this letter was sent, was Jehoram, the son of Ahab. It was toward him that the prophet had dealt so faithfully and so independently when consulted by him in the matter of the war with Moab. Fidelity to God required then the stinging reproof, which in the hearing of the king of Judah the prophet administered to him; the honour of God was sufficient cause now, why apparently without any solicitation on the king's part, the prophet should interpose his service, that

the God whom He served might receive a measure of the glory which is ever and everywhere due to His name. Yet his services must be rendered in such manner that the servant of the true and living God shall be signally distinguished from the false prophet of the false gods. "Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." The man who fears God need fear none and nothing besides, yet how true, alas! is it to this day that "the fear of man bringeth a snare," though some few there are who rise above it, and earn the noble eulogium spoken over the earthly remains of Knox the reformer, to whose fidelity to the cause of truth we owe so much, viz., that in the cause of God and truth he never feared the face of clay.

The poor idolatrous king of Israel is thrown into a state of consternation and alarm by the letter of his brother king. He feels that there is laid upon him, if not an obligation, at least the weight of brotherly regard to comply if he can with the request made to him. If he can—but there lay the difficulty. Gladly he would if he could, that he might remain on terms of amity with his neighbour king. But though kings can do many things which are beyond the reach of ordinary men, there are many more which they cannot do. They cannot bribe God to wink at their sins; they cannot avert death; and they cannot cure leprosy. This embassy from Syria brought the king of Israel, for a season at least, to his senses. He acknowledges that the cure of leprosy belonged to Him alone who could kill and make alive. Kings could do the former, and many of them have gone to their

own account with much blood-guiltiness upon their heads, even blood-guiltiness of the darkest character, judicial murder, the very blackest of all ; but the latter, the proudest and haughtiest of them all, would confess to be no prerogative of theirs. The king of Syria should have known enough of leprosy to know that his very embassy was a confession that it was beyond his own power ; and probably he had no such idea of the power of Israel's king as to believe that he could do what himself could not ; but then the prophet whose power was so greatly extolled was, for the time at least, a subject of Israel, was as he believed at the bidding of Jehoram, and in right royal style he calls for the exercise of the prophet's office, as if the servant of the Lord of Hosts was equally at the commandment of the earthly monarch.

Jehoram is cast into a state of pitiable, but most humbling perplexity by the message ; he himself knew so well the incurable nature of leprosy by any human means, that he seems to have concluded that Ben-hadad (who appears to have been king of Syria at the time), seeing that he also must have known the incurable nature of leprosy, only sought by a pretence to seek a quarrel with him. He might have known, he should have known as well as the little captive maid, that God had a prophet in Israel, and if he had had as much acquaintance with the God of Israel as she had, and as much faith in Him, he would have remembered that there was hope in Israel concerning even this thing, and saved himself from his unmanly fears. The forgetters and the despisers of God sooner or later come to know what it is to be lightly esteemed.

VERSE 8. "And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." The report of the king's pusillanimity soon reached Elisha. However his patriotism may have operated in respect of the king, his piety roused him into action for the honour of Jehovah, whose servant he gloried in being—no doubt the first had its influence, but the overbearing regard was the glory of God. It has sometimes been made an objection to the Gospel that it overlooks the duty of patriotism, and ignores the bond and obligations of friendship between man and man. But the fact is that the religion which inculcates the duties of a universal brotherhood, presenting every man as a brother to his fellow man, and which at the same time recognises a peculiar obligation in respect of those who are fellow-members of the household of faith, must not only not be unfriendly to the relations of private friendship, but must regard favourably every man's supplication, when, with a feeling in his heart of good will to all men, he still prays with a peculiar fervour for the peace of his own Jerusalem. In truth there is no affection of the human heart by which God may be glorified, and man's estate on earth be ameliorated, but will find its sanction in the Word of God. We fear it is only in the better world that the family tie will be so seen in its wide extent, and so felt in its power of affectionate attachment, as lovingly to embrace all, while we can conceive that even there there

may be ties of greater intensity, the renewal in a different shape of bonds so tender and so powerful that nothing but death could have severed them.

“Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes?” This act of rending the garments was the outward and visible mark of either great or simulated distress of mind. It was not a make-believe in the case of Jehoram, for he was evidently meanly, even shamefully terrified and distressed by the message of his brother king. When God sent that message to His ancient people, saying, “Rend your hearts and not your garments,” we are not to conceive of Him as interdicting all use of the outward sign, whether as expressive of mourning or of repentance, but as teaching the vanity and inefficacy of the outward sign where the inward grace was wanting. The former was but mere mockery when it stood in the place of and was unaccompanied by the latter; and just so it is with our lip confession of sin, and our profession of repentance in words, when there is no corresponding movement of the heart towards the Holy One whom we have so often and so grievously offended. Ah! who can tell how often we have all in this respect offended; a fellow-sinner we may deceive, but God is not mocked; and were He not indeed long-suffering and slow to anger, we should have long ere now found out that the deceit which we could practise upon ourselves did not impose upon God. It is to be feared that often we all of us carry the rent garments with us to the throne of the heavenly grace, in the shape of very large and very humble confessions of sin, while the rent heart is left

behind, in that the sin confessed is not always sin deeply felt and deeply deplored.

There was a prophet in Israel who could do for the king of Israel what his own kingly estate could not accomplish for him. The prophet's proffer of help was, so far as appears by the narrative, unsolicited by the king; he does not seem to have had faith enough in his idol gods to apply to them, either directly by himself, or by the ministry of their priests; while he had either forgotten the existence of the God of Israel, or was afraid to seek to Him through the ministry of His prophet, after he had betaken himself to other gods. Be that as it may, he found refuge and help where he had no right to look for any. But is it not ever thus between God and mankind sinners; "behold, how gracious is our God;" is He not ever preventing us with His goodness, and were it not so, our case would be not only miserable, but hopeless. What is the conduct of man universally, but a copy of the conduct of our first parent, who under the consciousness of guilt, and with a mind darkened by sin strove to hide himself from God. Before the entrance of sin, gracious and endearing intercourse with God was the truly normal (natural) relation of man to God; just as it is and ever will be the normal relation of the holy and happy creatures of God for ever—the happy because holy. "We love Him because He first loved us;" this is the invariable order and sequence in the kingdom of God; and the most diligent and faithful and fruitful of all the servants of God are the readiest to confess "Of thine own have we given thee." But these will at the same

time be found not only to be readiest with their acknowledgments of their indebtedness to Divine grace for being what they are, but readiest also in imitation of their Master and Lord in His spontaneous beneficence—"Freely ye have received, freely give." They do not, at least they should not need to be importuned. When God has to be importuned by the prayers of His people before answering their request, it is not from any unwillingness to grant them what is good, but for reasons wise in themselves, and graciously meant for the good of those who fear and call upon His name. "The Lord will give what is good," but He will do it also when it is good. The gift and the time and manner of the giving will all bear the marks of infinite wisdom and goodness—"Therefore though He tarry, wait for Him, He will surely come, He will not tarry."

VERSES 9, 10. "So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean." Naaman came in all his pride of place to the door of the house of the prophet. He does not hesitate to avow that he expected a very different reception from what he actually experienced. He had been accustomed to the most obsequious attendance of his dependents, and to the reverential regard of all with whom he was brought into connection. And doubtless Elisha, as the servant of God—by whom kings reign, whose providence has established distinctions of rank, and whose will it is that honour should be paid

to whom honour is due—did not without good cause set aside the courtesy that was due to the rank of the Syrian stranger. No doubt he had been honourably received by the king of Israel, and by him he was directed to the prophet of Israel. But the prophet represented the God of Israel, and it was His honour that he had to maintain. He dare not therefore stoop to the fawning arts which characterised the intercourse between the common people, and the priests, and pretended prophets of heathen lands, and also betwixt them and the great and the wealthy to whom an excess of respect, bordering upon if not realising a debasing servility, was paid.

Elisha sent a messenger, and the message was, "Go, wash in Jordan seven times"—an easy, simple, and inexpensive cure, if effectual. Its very simplicity, the readiness by which it may be immediately tested, and the absence of all costly offerings, should have recommended it to instant adoption. Naaman should have thought, as he must well have known, that if he had been in the hands of any of his own country prophets, he would not have been scandalised by the simplicity and inexpensiveness of his cure. We wonder how such a conviction as this did not at once suggest itself to him, no doubt prejudice did its part in making him look suspiciously at the words of one who was to him the prophet of a strange God—the pride of his heart too, stirred at the coolness of his reception at the hand of the prophet, would come in aid of his prejudice, if it was not rather contempt at the simplicity of the cure—"Go, wash in Jordan seven times." Why seven times? Who can tell? The

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number seven is the most frequent of occurrence of any number recorded in the Bible ; and there may be, we had almost said there surely is a reason for this, though it may lie too deep to be discovered by us. The frequency of its recurrence is indeed remarkable, and that too in connection with persons and objects or events, of widely different nature or character. Neither its natural place among the numerals, nor any nor all the compounds which may be formed out of it in connection with the science of mathematics, will account for its frequent appearance in the sacred record. The seventh day was the period of repose after a finished creation, good in all its parts ; good in the eyes of the sons of God, whose jubilant shouts expressed at once their admiration and their joy ; and good, above all, in the eyes of Him who could not be deceived, and whose estimation is that of unerring rectitude. It was in the seventh month that the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat, after a display of judgment which will be equalled only by the judgment of the great day when the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and then the judgment by water shall be far surpassed by the awful accompaniments of the Lord's second coming. It would occupy much space to enumerate the occasions on which we find this numeral bearing a part, and after all but little light might be thrown on the cause or reason for it.

It is evident that the simplicity and easiness of accomplishment of the prophet's prescription was a stumbling-block in the way of Naaman's faith. Just as the simplicity of the Gospel redemption is a scandal in the eyes of self-righteous moral men of the world,

who looking abroad on the degrading vices of the drunkard, and on the licentious and dishonest men of the world, think foul scorn at the idea that the way into the kingdom of heaven should be the same for them—the honoured and the honourable—and for those who are the outcasts of society, with whom they are unwilling to believe that there is anything whatever in common. And in truth, so far as this world is concerned, and so far as social intercourse is concerned, the difference between the two classes is immense, while in regard to God, and man's relation to Him, the distance from God may not be appreciably greater in the one class than in the other. Nay, looking at the declaration of the Saviour, "Verily, I say unto you, that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you," the distance would appear to be in favour of the helots of human society. So little alive are these self-righteous moral men to the evil of sin in the sight of God, and to the fact that wherever sin exists, whether to a greater or less extent, there (without atonement) there can be no peace, far less friendly loving intercourse with God. Such men do not regard sin as so very exceeding sinful, and their light thoughts of it lead to an overlooking of much that is sinful in them, so that they are able to keep on very good terms with themselves, and to trust that they stand on equally good terms with God. They forget that it was one sin that drove Adam out of paradise, opened the flood-gates of evil, and necessitated (in order that the love of God might have free and unrestricted access to the human family,) the Cross of

Calvary and the Son of God lifted up thereon. One sin even if it stood alone would necessitate atonement; but it never did, and never can stand alone. Alas, the flood-gates once opened, the swelling tide of iniquity could find no resisting power in man, and but for the grace of God, that first sin of the one man would have turned the whole world into an Aceldama or field of blood, or a Bochim, a valley of tears. The Cross of Christ the beloved, the infinitely beloved of the Father, should open the eyes of men to the evil of sin, and their hearts to an impression of the danger attending it.

But there is another and a far more interesting class who are not scandalised like the other at the simplicity of the Gospel, but being deeply convinced of the evil of sin, and of their own sin in particular, look upon the Gospel tidings as news too good to be true, not in general, they fear God and revere His word too much for that, but as applicable to their own individual case. Man in his natural state thinks so lightly of sin that it is difficult, indeed but for the grace of the Holy Spirit impossible, to convince him of its vileness and guilt, and of the danger accompanying it; but when the Spirit has "convinced of sin," the difficulty then is, and that too only to be surmounted by the Spirit's gracious power, to persuade him that there can be mercy for guilt like his. We are persuaded that there are very few, if any, brought into this state of broken-heartedness and contrition for sin, who are not led sooner or later to enter into Christ's covenant, and into the possession of peace and joy in believing. Temporary convictions of sin there

may be, and, alas ! are too many, which issue in the dog returning to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire ; but the conviction to which we have alluded is a conviction too deep and too abiding to be the work of nature ; and as the work of the Spirit of God it does not fail, cannot fail, for He who began the good work will perfect it unto the day of Christ. To the subjects of such conviction the very simplicity of the Gospel, is that which makes it to them glad tidings of great joy ; and the absolute freeness of the salvation as God's gift to the undeserving, a gift which could never have been purchased by men, and for which nothing in the shape of equivalent can ever be rendered, makes it to them subject of thanksgiving, and calls from them a tribute of praise, ever paying, never exhausted ; and the very rendering of which will be a joy unspeakable, and full of glory. Thus it is not the freeness of salvation at which this class of men stumble, nor at its unrestricted offer to all who will take and live ; they know it must be free because men have no equivalent to offer in exchange for it, nor any thing that in mercy might be taken as a satisfaction for its unspeakable value ; its unrestricted offer to all the sons of men is in their eyes a glorious illustration of the grace of God ; their doubts and fears arise out of something in themselves which as they think has carried them out of the pale within which salvation is free to all. They forget that God has erected no barrier against the access to Him of the contrite and broken-hearted, but has on the contrary invited their approach to Him, saying, "To this man will I look," that is to every

man that is humble and who trembles at His word. There is no man that *will*, who needs to fear that God *will not*.

VERSES 11, 12. "But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a rage." "Naaman was wroth." He had conceived a mode of procedure which he thought it would be becoming in the prophet to adopt, and for him to submit to. If washing is to cure, he thinks he had no need to come so far from home; the rivers of Damascus were he thought better than, not Jordan only, but than all the waters of Israel. The disciple is often wiser in his own conceit than his master. How many go to the Scriptures of God with their own preconceived notions of what they ought to find there; which is just a going not to learn of God, but to confirm themselves in their own belief; and so when they meet with any thing which will not square with their ideas, every possible method is adopted to explain or explain away the stubborn passage, and to confirm the views which they brought with them to the Word of God. These foregone conclusions which men bring with them to the Bible, not for the purpose of testing them by the Bible, but that they may get the Bible to bear witness to them, cannot be but of pernicious effect. They betray a state of mind the very opposite of that which Christ com-

mends when He says That if we receive not the kingdom of God as a little child, we shall in no wise enter therein, to the fitness and propriety of which reason at once assents. For what is the object of the Bible but to teach us that which only a Divine revelation could make known. It was not to teach men scientific truth that the Bible was given; it was not to demonstrate to men the great truth of the being of God, which is the foundation stone of all truth, for that in the teaching of the Bible is with entire propriety taken for granted; nor yet again does the Bible profess to reveal the secrets of the world to come, though the solemn and all important truth that there is such a world it has brought clearly to light; nor yet once more does it profess to reveal the mysteries of our own nature, nor the many mysteries which so thickly stud the physical and intellectual worlds around us. But it has done that which it professes to do, it has made known to us the will of God for our salvation, and of all themes there is none which touches us so nearly as that. For apart from a declaration by God Himself, we could never have known whether He would show mercy, or upon what terms He would be pleased to do it. It would have been great presumption in men to form beforehand theories of mercy for God; but the presumption and the guilt are far greater if men cavil at the revealed plan of mercy, and add and pare away to bring it as they think into a consistency with right reason. The very idea of offering a full and unconditionally free remission to sinners of the vilest character, and that on the very instant of their acceptance of the offer, is an

idea which never would have been conceived by man. The objection on the part of the disputer of this world is, that the doctrine is licentious in that it must lead to licentiousness.

But God has confounded over and over again the wisdom of the propounders of this objection, by the evidence of innumerable holy lives of men, who, by the offer of Christ to them, and their acceptance of it by faith, have been lifted out of the very lowest depths of guilt and pollution on to the platform of holiness, to the ground of a humble consistent life and conduct becoming the gospel. The objection proceeds on the assumption, that the change which has passed upon the converted man is a mere change of state, a passing from a state of danger into a state of safety ; whereas, while it certainly is that, it is something more and higher, for it is a change of nature or of condition, not only the man's circumstances are changed, but the man himself is changed. The objection takes for granted that the man is naturally as much inclined to sin as ever he was, taking no account of that change of nature by reason of which he has become dead to sin, and that he cannot live any longer therein—not so dead to it that he never sins again, but so dead to it that he cannot live in it as he once did ; formerly it was his delight, now it is his burden, formerly the remembrance of past sins gave him no trouble, now it humbles him in the dust before God, and makes him go softly in self-distrust, looking to the burden-bearer for all needed strength. In the language of the prophet he can say, " Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the


wormwood and the gall, my soul hath them still in remembrance and is humbled in me." A new life is surely evidence of a changed heart, and where this new life is not forthcoming in every instance of a professed conversion, a return to old habits convict it of being only a counterfeit; but on the other hand, every instance where the new life follows is established by the Saviour's maxim, "By their fruits ye shall know them." God alone can try the heart, but the evidence of a holy life can be read and understood of all men.

Naaman was right enough so far; there was nothing in the waters of Israel naturally to give them any remarkable superiority to the rivers of Damascus, they may have been more, or they may have been less salubrious than the other; but there was nothing in either to give them efficacy in curing such a disease as leprosy. The virtue to such an effect as this must be a virtue imported into them from without, and not being natural to them would be a virtue specially designed for a special occasion. But professedly he was come to a prophet of God (or as he who believed in gods many and lords many would rather imagine *to the prophet of a god*), and should therefore have remembered that he was come to seek something beyond the ordinary course of nature, and that the more out of the ordinary course of nature the mode of cure proposed was, just the more faith he should have had in it. But this poor leper did not stand alone in his inconsistency. There are many who believe that the powers of nature are adequate to recover all the aberrations of nature in the mental and spiritual

constitution of man. That there is aberration they admit, and in the face of abounding iniquity without him, and of his own conscious derelictions of duty he would be a bold man that would deny it; they nevertheless persist in the belief that nature, human nature, has not gone so far astray as to be hopeless and helpless, but may, perhaps, with some little help from Divine goodness, recover for itself a platform of righteousness sufficiently elevated to meet God, and to stand accepted in His sight upon it.

As it is true on the one hand, that there is no conceivable baseness or atrocious wickedness which has not been over and over again exemplified in the history of mankind, so there is no delusion so gross as to find no place in that history. Thus men delude themselves into the belief that there is no such mighty evil in sin that repentance cannot cleanse it with perhaps a make weight on the part of Christ: that the gate of righteousness is not so very strait, nor the way of righteousness so very narrow, but that man may by the power of his own inherent moral strength force his way into the one, and maintain his ground in the other. Together with these light thoughts of sin, and high thoughts of man's moral power, there is in regard to Christ either the sinking of the design of his death into a mere example, or if atonement is allowed to it, it is only a modified atonement such as admits of a commingling of man's work with Christ's work, and a division of the honour of salvation between Christ and man himself as a co-worker with Christ. The former idea of the death of Christ as a mere example, is held in connection with the denial

of His being anything higher, or anything more than a mere man ; the other is often held along with an admission of His Divine nature ; but surely it is little honour to that nature to allow it only a partnership with man in the work of human redemption, and make Christ share the honour with man himself. The work of creation had no partnership connected with it, and it would surely be strange if the yet greater work of redemption admitted of any such divided honour. God has declared that He will not give His glory to another, nor His praise to graven images ; and this declaration was made mainly in connection with His honour as the Creator of all things, and with His praise as the Disposer of all things ; and how much more may we expect the declaration to apply in connection with that most wonderful of all His works—the work of redemption. Take the salvation as revealed in the Scriptures, and it is a glorious display of the manifold wisdom of God ; harmonious in all its parts, honouring to God, and while abasing man, at the same time exalting him—the subject of highest admiration to the angels in the heavenly places. But let the crude fancies of men intrude within this so hallowed sphere, then how does the gold become dim—the most fine gold is changed. There is no peace nor rest, no health nor cure, but in the salvation as fulfilled and finished by Christ, and when received in the way, and upon the terms in which it is offered to men in the Gospel. It will admit of no human admixture, and as God's altar was polluted, if tool of man was lifted upon a stone of it, the same pollution accompanies the admixture of man's wisdom




with the wisdom of God, in the great matter of redemption.

VERSES 13, 14. "And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it ; how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean ? Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God ; and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." It was well that the great man's servants had more wisdom than the great man himself. Had he been bidden do some great thing, he would have done it, if at all within his competence, for it was in order to obtain a great thing ; but what he was bidden do was so trifling in his eyes, there seemed so little to connect the proposed cure with the disease, that it looked to him like foolishness to make the attempt ; and but for the common sense wisdom of his servants he would have returned home a leper, most probably an incurable leper to the day of his death. Little likely it was that such another opportunity would ever have come in his way again. And so the preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness, yet it pleases God by the preaching of that foolishness to save them that believe. And the wise men of the world say that it is indeed foolishness to preach a free and instant salvation to notorious sinners, for that is a sure way to confirm them in evil doing. Such is their ignorance of the human heart, and especially of the human heart when touched of Divine grace by the Holy Spirit ; for this grace changes the heart, and the changed heart changes

the conduct. The old unrenewed heart cannot but sin ; but the new heart cannot sin, because it has been born of God ; that is, it cannot live in the practice of sin, not that it never commits any sin. For the very Apostle who, speaking by the Spirit of God, said that the sons of God cannot commit sin, said also, speaking by the same Spirit, and, moreover, speaking of himself and fellow-believers, " If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."


Entire freedom from sin is the glorious privilege of heaven, and in itself constitutes a blessed enjoyment of which we can as yet form very little conception indeed. As it was not for the disciples to know the times and the seasons, the knowledge of which the Father had reserved to Himself, as little is it for us (as yet at least) to know the reason or reasons why, while the believer is justified on the instant of his believing, and is equally justified with all his fellow-believers, the sanctification should be so long progressive in all, and should also be so unequal in the members of the believing family. That there is reason for it, we cannot doubt ; reason which will not only justify God, but when read in the light of eternity will redound to the glory of His wisdom and goodness. Faith is the gift of God, and so is holiness, for " it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure ;" and that *He could* perfect holiness as He perfects justification, is not for a moment to be questioned. And our wisdom is to rest in the conclusion that He who doeth all things well, will in due time manifest that here also, as in every thing beside, the foolishness of God is wiser than men.

The argument of Naaman's attendants was a thoroughly reasonable one, in so much that the great man feeling its force yielded to them, and went and followed out the prophet's bidding, and the cure was as complete and as speedy as the means of cure were simple. "His flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." Before this not many would have been willing to exchange estates with him notwithstanding all his greatness, for it was only now that he could be said to enter upon the enjoyment of life. It is even so with the cure of the spiritual leprosy. It is only then that life becomes true enjoyment. It is a sad mistake, and has disastrous consequences, to suppose that the religion of Jesus Christ is a religion of gloom, and inconsistent with happiness, for the very opposite is the fact. It is the true and only source of real enjoyment. It alone has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. That life to come is to the follower of Christ a source full of hope, and even of present enjoyment through the instrumentality of hope; but to the unbeliever, and to the man who has the world in his heart, the thought of a life to come has nothing pleasurable in it, but the reverse. It reminds him of having to leave this world which is his all, for a world of which he knows little, and, alas! cares less. And if he would speak out his sentiments, he would probably say as Byron did to a friend of his, "I know that I exist now, and I fear that I may exist hereafter." Can you conceive a saying sadder than that? And here are the words of the (if not great), at least talented, leader of the French revolu-



tion, "Sprinkle me with perfumes, crown me with flowers, that I may thus enter upon eternal sleep." Would you like to die such a death? We hope and believe few would. Is not Balaam's wish (Godless prophet as he seems to have been) ours also, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his?"

Well, you may realise Balaam's wish, though it looks awfully doubtful if he himself did. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." The righteous One exchanged places with the unrighteous, that the unrighteous might enter into the merit of His magnifying of the law, and making it honourable. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints," and so everything in connection with their death—its time and its manner is disposed by a wisdom that cannot err, and a goodness that secures the believer against any thing that would look like a fatal surprise. Many of God's dear people have been taken at such unawares by death, that unless they were secure in Christ before the last enemy fell upon them, they must have perished. Being in Christ is the believer's absolute security that the stroke of death cannot injure him or his fellow-believers, for "whether they lived they lived unto the Lord," and therefore whether they die they die unto the Lord. Death has no independent sovereignty, if it can be said to have a sovereignty at all; at the most it is but a delegated one, exercised as to time and way in complete subordination to the will and guiding providence of Him who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel. The



sting of death is sin, and Christ having by His death for sin expiated its guilt on behalf of His people, has rescued them from the bondage, never to come under its yoke again.

VERSES 15, 16. "And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came and stood before him ; and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel ; now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. But he said, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it ; but he refused." The rage in which the great man left the prophet has completely passed away, and the restored leper returns *with all his company*, grateful in heart and not ashamed to acknowledge before all the greatness of his obligation. His conduct reads a lesson to all, and conveys a quiet rebuke to many. Though ignorant as yet of Him who is at once the great source of all good, and the great object of gratitude and love, yet to his benefactor, whether man or God, he acts in the spirit of the Psalmist's words, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul." And though as yet his gratitude looks almost alone to a temporal benefit, he soon realises the truth of the Gospel maxim, "To him that hath shall more be given." This increase is the law of the Gospel kingdom ; it is so on earth, and we are not disposed to believe that it will fail in heaven, where the field of occupation is so indefinitely wide, and where the powers of the occupants shall have been so largely expanded—that field will not be a waste, nor these powers be an unfruitful deposit.

Washing with water by God's appointment cured the bodily leper, but the spiritual leper can be cured only by blood ; and that too only by blood which an Apostle calls the blood of God—"Feed the Church of God which he has purchased with His own blood." This cure by blood, and that too of the Son of God, is not only God's appointment, but with awful reverence we ask, could God have saved us in any other way ? It is true we are not capable of judging what God could or could not do. But we know there are things which even God cannot do ; He cannot lie ; the just God cannot commit iniquity ; " Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ? " And if so, did He not do right when He spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up to the death for us all ? His purpose was a most gracious one, namely, to save sinners ; but that the act may correspond in character with His own nature and character, it must be unchallengeable in the manner of its accomplishment. The equivalent to be given for ransomed sinners, must not be one merely in name, for that would not save from impeachment the justice of the Judge of all the earth. We are not prepared to say that the equivalent must not be in excess, any more than it must not be in defect of the needed ransom ; for when we remember the price actually paid for human redemption, we see at once that it was a price all price beyond ; a price equal to, nay beyond whatever application of it God might be pleased to make. But does not this very fact lead us to the conception, if not to the absolute conclusion, that however much beyond the value of the object to be accomplished was the price paid for

it, yet no less price would have availed to accomplish it. For if the price paid was so great, so infinitely great, would it, if less could have sufficed, have consisted with the wisdom of God to exact such a ransom, a ransom which He Himself alone could pay. This at all events we can say, that such a procedure would be singularly out of harmony with all the doings of God of which we are cognisant. If a less price than the blood of the Son of God would have sufficed to satisfy Divine justice, and to repair the dishonour done to the Divine law by the guilt of man, then, how does the death of Christ consist with the declaration, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?" And yet further does it not seem to follow that in such a view of the matter, there was a deference paid to man inconsistent with the paramount honour due to the Son of God. But what wondrous love, what special grace to the sons of men is displayed in that, if nothing else, nothing less will suffice, God will even give His only begotten Son, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The Apostle might well say, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

"There is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth;" they know what the sinner's change of state means, what a new prospect rises up before the new man, old things are passed away, and behold all things are become new. Naaman acknowledged his obligation before all his company; and the Apostle was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, but gloried in it as the power of God unto salvation.

Alas ! are all Christian men found equally ready to confess Christ before the world, before their families, before, friends, neighbours, and acquaintances ? It is the most base and the most dastardly and the most ignominious fear which ever disgraced our world, to be ashamed to be known as a follower and disciple of Christ ; and that, too, when and where no peril accompanies the avowed profession. We have heard of such a case (alas ! that it is not one case but many) where a son who had prospered in the world, would pass by his aged but poor parent upon the street, ashamed of his relationship to the instrumental author of his being. This is bad, bad indeed, to think of the aged parent skulking past his own child, knowing well that that child would think itself disgraced by the recognition of the parent. Who can tell the feelings of such a parent ? What can one say of such a child ? But, dark as this example is, it is not by much so dark as that of a professing disciple of Christ, being ashamed of Him who died to give him life, who trod the most awful winepress of wrath that the world ever saw, or will see. Every motive which can meet to kindle the holy flame of gratitude and love, and to keep it alive on the altar of the human heart for ever, meets in the person of Christ lifted upon the cross. Beside all this, think of the adoration of angels, the bent knee and the shaded face of the principalities and powers which fill the heavenly places, this on the one side ; and on the other the feeling of shame at being thought to be a Christian on the part of the child, fashioned of the dust of the earth, this is surely one of those things which carries amazement through

the ranks of heaven, if any thing done by man on earth can do it. With the feelings of gratitude and love, and all the holy actings which flow from these on the part of the Christian, they freely sympathise, looking onward to the time, when the one service in the same heavenly temple, will occupy the ancient inhabitants of heaven, and the redeemed from the earth.

“Behold now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.” This is as it should be; there is gratitude to the servant who is the instrument, and there is not only a direct acknowledgment of *the one only living and true God*, but a distinct, though indirect, recognition of Jehovah, as indeed the true and real healer. The worshipper probably of God’s many and lords many has heard in his spirit the great truth which was addressed in articulate words to the chosen people, “Hear, O Israel, Jehovah our God is one Lord.” There is no Pantheism here, he recognises a personal God, not the powers of nature, but a great Being whose hand alone has dispensed cure to him. The system of religion, or rather of irreligion, which hides God from the eye of His creatures, though it cannot hide the creatures from the eye of God, is the very system to meet the wants of every class of ungodly men. The licentious want a God who will not see nor care to see the abominations which form the staple and life of their enjoyment, and who will therefore never call them into judgment for them; the philosopher, again, who deifies nature, and will have no personal God to prefer claims upon his gratitude and love and obedience, finds in his system the

freedom which he covets, even a God who takes no cognisance of him and his ways, and will therefore never seek to call him to a reckoning, who asks no gratitude or love from him, and will therefore never challenge him for the base crime of ingratitude. How widely different the feeling of the Christian ; the confession of unspeakable obligation is no burden to him ; gratitude and love are the invariable and constant attendants of his new nature, and as " he that loveth not, knoweth not God," so " he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." Such should the Christian man and the Christian woman be, and such in greater or less, but in growing measure the true Christian is, though with many defects cleaving to him ; but his shortcoming is his burden, and his defects are matter of humbling to him, and of godly sorrow unto life, not like the sorrow of the world which worketh death.

" Now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant." There was nothing wrong on the part of Naaman in presenting a gratitude-offering to his benefactor, though the offering was not accepted. Ingratitude is one of the basest of the vices known amongst men ; and if this be true in regard to the intercourse of man with man, how great must be its turpitude when it exists in the relation of man to God ? We do not say when it exists in the intercourse of man with God, for the man who is ungrateful toward God seeks not, but rather shuns all communion with Him. We do not believe but that some degree of gratitude must exist in the heart of him who in any proper degree recognises God as the author of every good and per-

fect gift ; but the misery is that so few recognise this, but regard themselves as the builders up of their own estate. They think with the Assyrian monarch, though they do not always adopt his language, "by the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent." The man who can think thus, even if he has not the hardihood to avow it, cannot be a grateful man towards Jehovah God. Such a man if he acted by a fellow creature, as he acts by God, would be branded by the very world's opprobrium, but finds that he has lost no caste with his fellow men, when the object of his ungrateful forgetfulness is the "God in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways." And why so ? Alas ! because he is not solitary in his ingratitude, but is one of many who are in the same condemnation with him ; who dare not cast the first stone at him, because they feel that in condemning him, they would condemn themselves.

When we remember the picture of the judgment of the great day as drawn by Christ (Himself the judge), we are taught that one evidence of our gratitude to Christ will consist, not merely in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked among His brethren, but in our having done it as done unto Him. For apart from the doing it as to Him, pleased, as He no doubt is, to see His brethren in the flesh cared for, how should He accept that as good service done to Himself, which was done without any respect or regard to Him in any degree at all ? The cup of cold water given as to a disciple of Christ is accepted and honoured ; while even the body given to be burned, if

the sacrifice was destitute of love to Christ, profiteth nothing. Love to Christ sanctifies the smallest gift, and the largest is worthless without it. Alms given to merit heaven, to purchase pardon and peace, is just the acting of a mercenary spirit, and is essentially worldly; they are an insult to the justice of God, and are very much akin to the spirit of Simon Magus, who hoped to purchase the Holy Ghost with money; how different from the spirit inculcated by Christ, "let not your left hand know what your right hand doeth." Riches are God's good gifts to men, notwithstanding all the abuse which men make of them to His dishonour and their own grievous injury; but the large and liberal heart which is also God's gift, is by far the most precious endowment of the two, and ever is so regarded by the thankful possessor of them both. Treasure of the unrighteous mammon is laid up in heaven, not by the man who hopes to purchase his estate there, by something in the shape of an equivalent, but by him who feels that he is only giving God back a little of His own, and that he is God's debtor, not for the riches only, but for the privilege of being permitted to become a fellow worker together with God. Like David he is ever willing to make the confession "of Thine own have we given Thee."

Naaman's offering seems to have proceeded from no mercenary spirit, as if it had been payment for a benefit received, but as the grateful acknowledgment of a thankful heart, constrained by its own feelings to make the only acknowledgment in its power; and yet it is declined by the prophet, no doubt from

motives as proper and as powerful as those by which the offerer was actuated. The honour of God was concerned in the way in which His servant should act in this peculiar case: the heathen gods could not cure, but the heathen priests would take the pay, kill or cure. It was no feeling in the mind of the prophet of impropriety in the offerer in making a tender of the gift, nor of any impropriety on his own part in receiving under ordinary circumstances the benevolence or gift, which was in reality as much a due as it was a gift on the part of the people of God toward a servant of God. The principle that the labourer is worthy of his hire runs through the whole legal economy, and is adopted and enforced by the new. No doubt the prophet had good reason for acting as he did, though we may fail to discover it. Little doubt but that the feeling which actuated Abraham in his dealing by the king of Sodom, actuated the prophet also; as the avowed servants of the most high God, they would stand indebted to no false God or heathen worshipper for anything, but maintain their dependence solely on the God of Israel, and Naaman was not yet a recognised member of the household of God, though doubtless not even now far from the kingdom of the God of Israel.

“And he urged him to take it, but he refused.” It was a contest of gratitude on the one hand, and of principle on the other; but conducted no doubt on both sides in a spirit of kindness, which would neither give nor take offence. Principle is sacred and must be maintained at all hazards, but the utmost courtesy and forbearance are consistent with the most stead-

fast adherence to unbending principle. "The servant of the Lord must not strive," but be patient and gentle also towards all men. The courtesies of life are not only consistent with the most rigid adherence to principle, but rather when exhibited in a Christian spirit commend principle to the gainsayer. The more unbending the principle, the more should love and gentleness commend it to favour and acceptance; men are often drawn by the cords of love, who would never have been dragged by denunciation and hard words.

VERSES 17, 18, 19. "And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord. In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon; when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing. And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way." From the form of words used by Naaman, we would conclude that the Syrians had sacrifices of more kinds than one. We know that they had sacrifices, part, at least, of which was eaten by themselves, and also by their guests when they made a feast; and probably the burnt offering of which he speaks may have been a sacrifice which was wholly consumed upon the altar of the heathen deity. Now he professes his resolution to sacrifice no more in any manner to the gods of his


country, but to the God of Israel only, whom he had already confessed to be the only living and true God. His request for the two mules' burden of earth was evidently dictated by a feeling in the right direction though superstition had no small share in dictating it. Not only would he henceforth worship the God of Israel, but if possible he would do it only on the soil of Israel. He was too recent a convert to have yet entered into a comprehension of the spirituality of the Divine nature, and the spiritual nature of the worship which God requires. How few of the people of Israel were in this respect, notwithstanding all their advantages, entitled to look down upon the stand-point of the Syrian, low as it was. How few of them could enter much more fully than the born heathen, into the principle laid down by the Apostle when he said, "Meat commendeth us not to God, for neither if we eat are we the better, neither if we eat not are we the worse. Right apprehensions of the spirituality of the Divine nature are not easily attained, and yet they lie at the foundation of all acceptable worship. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of all who diligently seek Him." "But unto the wicked, God saith, Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an One as thyself, but I will reprove thee, and set them (thy sins) in order before thine eyes."

The Atheist and the Pantheist (which is just a genteeler and milder name for Atheist) may laugh at Naaman's two mules' burden of earth, but while we do not justify the state of mind betrayed by the request, it was a state of mind infinitely preferable to

the mind filled with the cheerless darkness and coldness of Atheism, "without God and without hope in the world." Job could say, "If a man die, shall he live again. All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou wilt call and I will answer Thee." But the Atheist does not expect to live again, more pitiable still and painful the fact, he does not even wish it. He knows of no power which has appointed the bounds of his habitation; he sees that all men die, and he submits to the thought of death as to that of a bitter necessity which he would evade if he could, but cannot. What a cheerless state of existence is that of the man to whom this world is his all, and yet feels that he has no control over it, nor knows who, or what has. Truly may it be said of him, that he is in jeopardy every hour. If his time were measured out to him by a wise and beneficent being, there would be some comfort even in the thought of death, but in casting off God, he has deprived himself of this, for only the godly man hath hope in his death. Yet, still more sad is the contentment with which the Atheist contemplates the utter extinction of his being. To hear an intelligent and immortal creature debating on the side of annihilation is as sad a perversion of intelligence as it is possible to conceive. It is a self-degradation of the basest character, and awfully vile in the sight of God. Surely there is an awful defacement of the Creator's image there, but he that contendeth with the Almighty must answer for it.

But amid this fulness of acknowledgment of the God of Israel as the one only living and true God,

there is interposed a reservation, not on behalf of an idol god, but in behalf of himself when placed as he was sure he would be placed in circumstances where his conduct might look like an act of defection from the true God, and like an act of idol worship. This incident has given rise, and very naturally, to much questioning, both as regards the act itself and the view taken of it by the prophet ; was the act in question an act of idolatry ? was it sanctioned by the prophet ? By some Naaman's act of bowing in the house of Rimmon while the king leant upon him, has been regarded as more a political than a moral or religious act. We do not think this view at all defensible, as to us it would seem to cover and sanction every act of apostacy which proceeded, not from private self-interest, but from the imperious bidding of the ruling power. But was it really an act of apostacy ? Not in heart certainly, but it has very much the appearance of it in deed. He who searches the hearts and can weigh motives as well as deeds, and who knows the human heart in its weakness as well as in its strength, who " knows our frame and remembers that we are but dust," He who could so sympathise with the human heart as to propound the maxim that new wine must not be put into old bottles, sees, we verily believe, a true and a loving, though a weak and timid heart, where men of sterner mould, and never tried in the same way themselves, have seen and cried out that word of evil omen, apostacy. He who so lovingly restored Peter has no doubt restored since then, and retained for them their place in His heart of love, many whom men have branded as apostates.




We do not wish to think, far less to speak lightly of seeming apostacy, but we do wish to cherish the hope that there have been instances where the compelled word has belied the loving heart, and where the tears of godly sorrow have found the same pardoning grace which was extended so freely to the standard bearer, Peter, when he had fainted.

We think it would be presumption to stigmatise the act of Naaman as an act of apostacy, notwithstanding its ugly look. Is it any great wonder, if the babe in Christ, does not all at once reach the stature of spiritual manhood, if the newly enlisted soldier of the cross does not at once attain the rank of spiritual heroism? Naaman will pay no spiritual homage in the house of Rimmon, and yet more he intends no homage at all when he bows in the heathen temple; all that he will do, though bearing the appearance of the old idolatrous service is by him intended as nothing more than civil respect to the head of the nation.

He was treading no doubt upon delicate ground, but what does the faithful prophet of the true God say to it? "Go in peace." Perhaps the following incident may cast some light upon the prophet's answer. It is said that a lady who had lived in the gay world, immersed in its dissipation and follies, and particularly attached to balls and dancing, having become concerned about her spiritual state before God, went to consult that faithful and singularly judicious servant of God, John Newton. Her object was to take his opinion whether she could still indulge in balls and dancing consistently with a religi-

ous profession and spiritual safety. The reply he made to her may be considered a singular one, it was, "Madam, dance while you can," very much a second edition of the prophet's "Go in peace." The answer in both cases being (as we believe) dictated by a conviction that if the parties were in earnest, the spirit of the spiritual life would soon be found in the one case to put an end to the seeming idolatry, and in the other to balls and dancing; in short, would soon lead in both instances to avoid the very appearance of evil. Christ said to Peter, when foretelling him of his fall, "When thou art restored, strengthen thy brethren," thus foretelling his restoration as well as his fall; and do not the words carry in them a message of mercy through Peter to his brethren who also having fallen, and like him repented with bitter tears, needed the restoring message of pardon and peace through the blood of sprinkling.

And who can speak a word to the weary and heavy laden like him, who by his own personal experience knows what it is to be weary and heavy laden himself? Christ, even "though He was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which He suffered." And, "in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted." This is wondrous truth when we reflect who was the tempted, who was the suffering one. There is strong consolation here, more than in all the instances of the tempted and fallen and restored ones of the Bible record; than David or Peter, or any other whatever. It was a real experience which the man Christ Jesus gained by His own suffering being



tempted ; we know that as man He grew in wisdom as well as stature, while we equally know that as God He was incapable of increase of any kind. It may be asked why, seeing He was God, and therefore possessed of infinite fulness of knowledge, He needed to come into the knowledge of human suffering by His own experience of it. And the question is easily asked, may be asked by a child, but a full and exhaustive answer would task an angel's powers. Is it nothing that in the wondrous fact, that the well beloved of the Father, and the Father's co-equal, co-eternal Son, the tried Christian who is received and acknowledged by the Lord Jesus as indeed a brother, having one God and Father with Himself ; in all this the tried Christian man or woman finds an inexhaustible spring of consolation, well assured that He who hath suffered being tempted, is not only able to succour them that are tempted, but seeing His very errand into the world was to seek and to save the lost, He must be as infinitely willing as He is infinitely able to succour them that are tempted. How true His fellow-feeling with the afflicted, may be in some measure conceived by contemplation of the scene in the garden, and witnessing the awful reality of His endurance there—being in an agony, and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

And then it is this same Jesus, with all His fellow feeling for us, who is to be our sovereign Judge in the great day of final reckoning ; and not only so, not only is He to be Judge, but He tells us Himself, that God "hath given Him authority to execute judgment

because He is the Son of Man." Is it too much to believe, that this deputation of judgment to the Lord Jesus Christ, was not only in reward of His glorifying the Father by His obedience unto death, and of His magnifying the law and making it honourable, but also, in a measure at least, for the comfort and encouragement of Christ's people, seeing that in Him they have a Judge who is bone of their bone, a Judge who knows their frame, and remembers that they were but dust.

VERSES 20, 21, 22, 23. "But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought; but, as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him. So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well? And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from Mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets; give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him." Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, was of a different mind, as well as of a different spirit, from his master. He coveted riches, and was ready to compromise his master's character, and to practice deceit upon the stranger for a little ill-gotten gain; truly does the Apostle say, that

"The love of money is the root of all evil." Not that all the evil which finds harbourage in the human heart, and outflow in the daily life and conduct of men is the result of the love of money; but that there is scarcely an evil of any kind to which the love of money may not give occasion, or has not indeed given rise. It is not money that is the evil, but the love of money; giving the heart's affection to it, putting the heart's trust in it. There is no meaner, baser passion upon earth, than the love of gold for itself; and yet there are men professing to be Christians, and thereby professing belief in their immortality; men standing well in the respect of their fellow-men, but who could not with Job deny that they had made gold their hope, and made fine gold their confidence. What need have all such to lay Christ's warning to heart, "What shall it profit a man to have gained the whole world, if he lose his own soul." We know that the love of money was at the root of the greatest act of guilt which was ever perpetrated on this earth; for though some have contrived an ingenious theory to mitigate, if not to excuse, the guilt of Judas, as if his design in betraying Christ to the chief priests was to compel Him to assume His kingly prerogative before the world; the language of Scripture, that "he was a thief and had the bag," is far too clear and precise to give the slightest countenance to such an explanation of the conduct of the miserable traitor.

There is no privilege bestowed in the economy of God's providence, and perhaps still less in the economy of God's grace, which is not, and most righteously ac-


accompanied by corresponding responsibility. The parable of the talents both proves and illustrates this. Money is just worth the reasonable and moderate enjoyment which men can take out of it; and more particularly the good they can do with it in helping the poor and needy, and above all, in promoting the glory of God. It is a very sad though a very common sight, namely, that of men wallowing in wealth, but expending it all upon the lusts of the eyes, the lusts of the flesh, and the pride of life; or equally, if not even more culpably, hoarding it tied up in the napkin, fruitless of every kind of good, whether as respects God or men, or even the poor earth worm himself. All wealth is a deposit from the great Owner of all things, and by Him expected back with increase. And, oh! if the servant who had but one talent entrusted to him was condemned, not for squandering, not for consuming it upon himself, but for its unfruitfulness because of unfaithfulness, what an answer are those to make to whom God gave wealth in superabundance, and health and strength, when He reminds them of what He did for them, and asks what they did for Him? Are not these represented but too faithfully by the man who appeared at the wedding feast without the wedding garment, and was speechless when he was enquired at?

Gehazi seems to have been one of those Jews who did not regard brotherhood as extending beyond the bounds of the Jewish faith, and so he was annoyed at his master sparing this Syrian. And using a form of words equivalent to a solemn oath, he determines that he shall have somewhat from him. He makes

good his object too, though in some degree at the expense of his master's honour, and at the expense of the guilt of deceit and fraud to his own soul. What a contrast between the open-handed liberality of the convert but just emerged from the darkness of heathenism, and the mean and greedy spirit of the born Jew. It is true that God did Himself erect a barrier between Israel and the outside heathen world ; and when we remember the proneness to idolatry of even God's chosen Israel, we see at once the great need of such a barrier. And yet the fence which God set up between the land of Israel and the lands of the heathen, was rather a protection for Israel against idolatry, than a barrier to keep out the heathen from the knowledge of the true God with all its blessed privileges. The great object was to keep the Jew in, not to keep the heathen out. Witness the instance of Ruth, the Moabitess, who became one of the most famous mothers in Israel, and a progenitor of our Lord Himself ; and Rahab also, another heathen born woman, attained to the same blessed distinction, and though at the time of their admission into the ranks and privileges of Israel, this honour awaiting them in the future was hidden from themselves, and from the cognisance of their generation ; yet their admission into the membership of the house of Israel is a proof, that while the door was shut against the Israelite going out unto the Gentiles, it was open for the Gentile becoming a partner of Israel's privileges.

VERSES 24, 25, 26, 27. " And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house ; and he let the men go, and they

departed. But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither. And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." Having hidden away his ill-gotten gain, Gehazi went in and stood before his master. The very hiding of his gain manifested his consciousness and convicted him of guilt. And he was soon made to know and feel that there had been a witness on whom he did not reckon. But he should have known, and if he had but given himself time to reflect did know, that there was a witness whom he could not deceive, even the God of the spirits of all flesh. Had he reflected upon that aright, he would have been saved from the guilt, and have escaped its punishment. But alas! how many follow Gehazi's footsteps in forgetting the all-seeing eye to which there is not a secret thing in the immense universe of God, compared with those who follow the example of Joseph, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" Did men carry about with them a vivid conviction of the soul-stirring truth, "Thou God seest me," it would make the world a very different place from what it is. If every act of sin were followed as speedily with detection, con-



viction and just recompense of reward, as was Gehazi's, what a leprous appearance would the human race present. But "because judgment against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." This delay of judgment was to the old heathen sages one of the most powerful arguments they had for a life after the present life in this world, and for a judgment to come. The being of God granted, it is indeed a reasonable argument, and its conclusion is irresistible; for the very character of God as a God of righteousness, justice, and truth, requires a judgment at the termination of the course, seeing that so much of evil passes so far as we can see unvisited now, and that so much wrong judgment proceedeth among the sons of men, if not unchallenged, at least unredressed.

We say *if not unchallenged*, because wherever the Bible is found it is challenged in unmistakeable language; and even independently of the Bible, there is enough of conscience in most hearts to vindicate the character of God, and to bring in men guilty without excuse before God. But the conclusion at which unassisted heathen reason arrived, is clearly disclosed in the Gospel, where God hath revealed a day wherein He will judge the secrets of men's hearts by Christ Jesus, and give to every man according to his works. And if the awards of unassisted conscience will leave man without excuse, how much more will the clear light of the Gospel? It will form a sad and heavy aggravation of guilt, that "light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather

than light, because their deeds were evil." Though the general principle of the Divine administration is revealed very fully in the Word of God, and is very aptly illustrated in the parable of the tares in the field, "Let both grow together until the harvest," yet the history of the world contains examples enough of visible manifestations of God's judgments to form an abundant earnest of a coming retribution, which will comprehend in its wide sweep, not only all men, but all the actions of all men whether they have been good or whether they have been evil.


"Went not mine heart with thee when the man turned again from his chariot?" Gehazi had attained his object, and the coveted gain was secretly, as he thought, and securely disposed of. But he had to stand before his master, and then he discovered that he had been discovered, and that the chief fraud he had been able to commit was a fraud upon himself. For though Naaman had in the simplicity of his heart been deceived, he had as he believed received a prophet, or at any rate he had received the pretended messenger in the name of a prophet, and doubtless he has received a prophet's reward. Gehazi has had many followers since his day, men (and women too, alas! the more the pity) who lay themselves out to prey upon the benevolence of the kind and Christian-hearted by forged tales of distress, and who, whilst feasting on their spoil, can glory in their shame, and cogitate and devise the while fresh plans of plunder, and mark out their intended victims of to-morrow. They forget the eye that is upon all their ways, the ear that hears every word of all their evil counsels,

the great God who reads thoughts and heart intents to which even they would be ashamed to give utterance in articulate language. "Went not mine heart with thee?" The deceiver forgets the Master of whom it is said that "the deceived and the deceiver are His," and before whom we have all to stand. The guilt incurred by such deceit is far greater than can be measured by the money out of which they have cheated their benevolent fellowmen. Most of these frauds are sooner or later brought out of the darkness into the light, and the effect almost necessarily is, to infuse suspicion and distrust into the hearts of the benevolent, and to check and limit the charity and kindness which would in different circumstances have overflowed to the worthy and deserving.

Yet if the motive was pure on the part of the giver, the having been deceived will not be imputed as guilt. Still to be deceived is an error and wrong if there were means of verification at hand. In such a case we have been doing evil when we meant to do good, and though the fault may be subject to comparatively small censure, it is a fault, and therefore is censurable. God's people, the brethren of Christ, who "know the grace of our Lord Jesus, that though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich," are bound by their very calling, by the very name they bear to be bountiful and to give cheerfully, "for the Lord loveth a cheerful giver." But then they are as much bound to give judiciously, that is discriminatively, as to give at all. Indeed, it is very much by this discriminative giving that we may try our benefactions, whether they flow

from a mere kind-heartedness to which it is painful to say no, or a giving unto the Lord because the love of Christ constraineth us. In the delineation of the last judgment given us by our blessed Lord, given us let us remember by the great Judge Himself, the acts of loving-kindness which He acknowledges and accounts as done to Him, are these acts done to His brethren, and doubtless too done in a large measure for His sake.

But all this, notwithstanding, there is mercy due to our poor brother on the footing of our common humanity, and no right-hearted follower of Christ will be slow to recognise it. This act will not stand upon the same high platform as the other, yet being done in recognition of the brotherhood established among men by our one Father, God, no question but it will be approved of Him who makes His sun to rise and His rain to fall upon the evil and upon the good; and also of Him who in the days of His flesh received sinners and did eat with them. Thus while we homologate the peculiar claims which our brethren according to the flesh, and also the at least equally peculiar claims of the brethren of Christ, who are our brethren in Him, have upon us, we cannot cast off from us the claim which those who are brethren in virtue of even a mere common humanity have upon us in their poverty and distress. And above all the fleshly necessity ought we never to forget their deeper poverty spiritually, so long as they remain ignorant of Christ and separated from Him. It is a right thing and a good deed to cast light into the darkened dwelling of a poor brother where poverty has quenched the light of




other and better days ; surely it is a right thing to make joy burn again on the hearth of the heart, where poverty, sickness, or bereavement, seemed to have quenched it for ever. And it is a very special service of love to take the young heart, which it is so sad and unnatural to see cheerless, and joyless, and prematurely aged, and speak to it words of love and hope ; and, by the ministry of loving deeds, recall it not only to the feeling of hope for the future, but to a sense of present enjoyment to which it had long been a stranger. Jesus took the little children in His arms, and blessed them—pregnant example ; and Jesus said, of such is the kingdom of heaven, a weighty argument too in behalf of little children. “A Father of the fatherless is God, in His holy habitation.”

Well, if we regard and acknowledge the obligation in regard to the body and the things of time, which all are to perish in the using, how emphatic does it become toward the undying spirit, and its interest in the undying realities of the endless life. “Let him know that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his ways, shall save a soul from death, and (thus) hide a multitude of sins.”

“The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave to thee and to thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.” The punishment may seem disproportionate to the offence, in the way, namely, of excess. There is no doubt but the prophet spake by the Spirit of God, for God homologated the word of His servant by the immediate effect, and no doubt by its after consequences. It is easy to speak of the judgment as harsh and severe, but

unless we could enter more deeply than we really can into the spirit and motive of the deed, we are not able fairly to judge in the matter. Besides which we have no title to judge ; for while the words were the prophet's, the deed was an act of God. And where God either speaks or acts, silence is our part, because He giveth none account of any of His matters, and because we know that He doeth all things well. Yet a good reason may be presumed—apart from every other motive which the prophet may have had for refusing the gift of the Syrian noble, we can hardly doubt, but the ruling motive was the honour of the God of Israel ; and in conservation of that honour, he would have the infinite distinction which obtained between the true God and the false gods of the heathen maintained to the utmost possible extent between the servants of the true and living God, and the dumb vanities of the whole heathen world. In this view Gehazi's sin was a great one : he may not have been conscious of the full effect of what he was doing, but does that at all mitigate his guilt, seeing that he was perfectly conscious that he was doing wrong, his own conscience bearing him witness to the fact ? The question is a delicate one, probably too deep for man's judgment, perhaps too deep for the judgment of any creature whatever. And hence when we consider all the elements which must have place in the fixing of the awards of truly righteous and perfect judgment, namely motives, consequences foreseen, or that might and should have been foreseen, and consequences possible or probable, which should have influenced the rational agent in regard to the



deed that is to be judged, we are led to the inevitable conclusion, that judgment must be the prerogative of God and not of man.

And hence follows, as we think, a strong inferential argument for the Divine nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. Only the heart searcher, and He who can try the reins is fit to judge those who will stand or fall fully as much, if not more by motives than by deeds ; more by the feeling which dictated the action than by the action itself. We believe that no created being is competent to this. When we think of the all but innumerable company which shall be found awaiting the awards of the great judgment day, and add to this the variety of motives by which men may be actuated in the performance of the self same deed ; and still farther when we add to all this the mixed motives which may have place almost unconsciously in that wonderful work of God, the human heart, we feel at once that an universal judgment is no fit task for human, no not for created power. It is true that God could reveal the right award in every instance to any one of His intelligent creatures, but that would not be the creature judging, it would at most be only the creature announcing the award of Him who is Judge indeed. But of our Lord Jesus Christ it is said, that " God hath committed all judgment to the Son," not the pronouncement of the award, but the award itself, and that He will judge the world in righteousness, not by Himself, but by Him whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

But something more dark and mysterious still to

us than the judgment inflicted upon Gehazi, is the same judgment denounced against his seed after him. It is not a solitary instance of God's visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, as well as upon and together with the fathers themselves ; as on the other hand there are instances not a few of the Lord's doing well to the children for the sake of the fathers. So common and so well known was this manner of dealing on the part of God with His people that it became a proverb in Israel, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." It is evident from the way in which the prophet is directed to speak to the people, that the Lord took this manner of speech ill at their hands. And yet did not the proverb carry truth in it ? Did it not spring out of what was really a prevalent mode of the Lord's dealing with His people, and with the outside world generally ? The error of the people, and the Lord's cause of complaint against them for it, seems to have lain in this, that they regarded themselves as burdened with the effects of the guilt of their fathers, whilst they themselves were at least comparatively guiltless. They did not so realise the truth of their own guiltiness as to see that independent altogether of the guilt of their fathers, the Lord was justified in respect of all the evil which He brought upon them. They were willing to admit that their fathers had eaten sour grapes, but they were unwilling to think of those which they had eaten themselves.

Over and above all this, it is to be remembered that whilst affliction must ever carry with it more or less

of a penal character, as but for sin there had been no sorrow, yet it is not always purely punitive. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." "If ye be without chastisement whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons." And again, "He chasteneth for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness." What then shall we say of the affliction which flows from love, and has its effect in a growing holiness? Shall we think of judgment or of mercy, and of loving kindness? Who could speak of such a result as this, but in terms of the warmest gratitude and love? It is true that no affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous, but rather grievous, but afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness, in those who are aright exercised thereby. And the result foreseen by faith, can in a great measure neutralize the present grievousness. For ages now, Naaman has been blessing God for that leprosy which was once the great trial of his life, and neutralized his wealth and his honours, and no doubt it will form part of his theme of praise for ever.

Scripture speaks of affliction, all affliction of whatever kind or degree, as "the light affliction which is but for a moment;" this is no doubt a true definition of all temporal affliction, but to realise its truth, we must look at it, not from the earthly side, but the heavenly; not from the stand point of time, but of eternity. For Scripture itself speaks of affliction as not joyous but grievous for the time present, and so it is often found to be by the very choicest of God's people, and the moment assigned to it for its duration

often comprehends days, months, and even years. "And patience has often enough to do to work out its perfect work ; for ye have need of patience that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." Light is the trial of our faith and of our patience in these latter days, compared with that of those to whom these words of the Apostle were addressed, for they had trial of cruel mockings, yea moreover of bonds and imprisonments, and if they were faithful unto death, what shame must be ours if we fail and come short in bearing so light a yoke and so easy a cross as falls to the followers of Christ in our days when none dare, none seek to make us afraid ?

ATONEMENT.



ATONEMENT.

IT is matter for continual gratitude and praise to God, that the doctrine of the true and proper Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ so pervades the Scriptures, which contain the only revelation of the will of God in regard to the salvation of men, that it is but barely possible to read and yet to miss the doctrine. We say *barely possible*, because apart from the known fact, that some who receive the Bible as to a greater or less extent a revelation from God, have missed the doctrine and seem to feel no want on that ground, we should have conceived such a thing literally impossible. If men can allow themselves to take freedom with the Bible, on the ground that there is truth of God in it, but that in its entirety it is not the word of God, then the revelation of God is just what men choose to make of it and nothing more. How such a revelation can consist with the wisdom of God, it is for those who hold this utterly subversive view of it to say, for to any unsophisticated understanding, such a view of revelation is such an impeachment of the wisdom of God as to leave us in doubt whether we have a vision from God at all. Such a revelation

would not only fail of the end for which a revelation is supposed to be given, but be actually divisive and misleading. If it is objected to us that many able men, and of a moral character commanding universal respect, repudiate the doctrine on the ground that to them it appears unscriptural; we reply, that many more of at least equal intellectual calibre, and of at least equal moral elevation have received it as unquestionably a doctrine of Scripture. But still further we remark that the consequences of the doctrine trench so deeply, not only on the moral character of the Divine administration, but on the character and prospects of men, namely, on their character as guilty and helpless, and on their prospects as hopeless in respect of man's own ability to deliver and save himself, that in the one case the natural pride of the human heart (perhaps the deepest rooted of all the evil principles which followed upon man's first departure from the living God) not only may but does pervert the understanding, while in the other the same principle which since the fall exists in all, has been overborne by the grace of God, and so far subdued as to make the subject of that grace willingly to submit himself to the righteousness of God.

There is nothing fanciful in this solution of the difference which obtains, betwixt the maintainers of the Socinian Doctrine on the one side, and the maintainers of the true Divinity and proper atonement of Christ on the other. The latter have seen something of the majesty of the holiness of God, and been led like the prophet Isaiah to cry out "Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips," while

the former have never been brought so near to the holiness of God as to feel their moisture turned into the drought of summer, and rottenness enter into their bones. Man has not language to describe what are sometimes his conceptions of the overwhelming holiness and majesty of the glory of the Lord; but the mind of man itself is utterly inadequate to the conception or reception of that essential glory. Meagre conceptions of the holiness of God naturally breed low and extenuating conceptions of the evil of sin; and these again as naturally lead to derogatory conceptions of the person and work of Christ. If the honour of God's law, which is the honour of God Himself, could be maintained after its violation, even by those who had violated it, so that the past breach should be atoned, and a future satisfactory obedience be rendered, then indeed it would be supererogatory in God to interfere at all, and much more so by such a costly interference as that of God manifest in the flesh and suffering and dying as well as obeying in room of the sinning creature. One or the other of these supposed cases must be false; to hold by both would be something far worse than a libel upon the wisdom of God, it would be a direct imputation upon His justice: it would be to affirm that He had laid upon the sinless the burden of the guilty, while the guilty was able enough in himself to bear his own burden. There would be neither mercy nor equity in this, but something the very reverse of both.

But if we could not bear our own burden, and if in the sovereignty of God's loving kindness a burden-bearer was to be provided for us, not a few elements

had to enter into the provision that it might meet and reconcile the two utterly antagonistic claims of, on the one side, the justice of God and the honour of His law, and safety for the self-ruined and helpless sinner on the other. We say not only ruined but helpless, that is incapable in himself of doing anything whatever to avert the ruin which his own guilt had wrought. And theoretically this helplessness may be argued from the fact that if man, as formed in the image of God, created in the likeness of God, without any concupiscence in his whole moral framework did not stand, much less could he stand now when the moral taint has infected his whole moral frame, and yet less still could he devise or effectuate any means whereby he, the banished, should be brought back again. Indeed, the problem of a possibility of restoration lay too deep for created intelligence, as still more did the power of accomplishing it lay beyond the power of created might. According to some men's conceptions there is nothing more easy, hardly anything so easy, as redemption, if indeed the mere act of forgiveness springing from a mercy which has no regard to the claims of justice or to the honour due to the character of God, can be entitled to the character of redemption. Redemption implies purchase, but in such an act there is no purchase, no vindication of the Divine honour, and no magnifying of the Divine law, but an exposure of it to neglect and contempt: if it was dishonoured in the breach, such an act of mercy can do nothing to reinstate it in the reverence of God's creatures.

We acknowledge that it is not for man or angel to

anticipate before hand what it is befitting God to do under any peculiar circumstances. And certainly beyond all other of the thoughts and dealings of God, the redemption of man by the peculiar interposition of Jesus Christ, was beyond all anticipation by created intelligence; but its marvellous peculiarity lies in the fact, that though Christ was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God, yet he took upon Him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself yet further, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. But if Christ was only a creature, however excellent and however exalted, the great wonder—that namely by which the love of God is so magnified and the honour of His law so exalted—ceases, or rather gives place to another. But the other wonder does not exalt God's character nor magnify God's law, but is a wonder rather by the fact that both seem to suffer, we shall not say degradation, but diminution, and thereby loss. If one creature can repair the dishonour done to God's law by another creature, and much more if one creature can do the work of reparation for guilty myriads, surely the awfulness of the Divine Majesty and Holiness and the integrity of the Divine Law are in a large degree divested of their unapproachable sacredness, and God has done what He had declared He never would do, even given His glory to another. For by whomsoever effected, there is glory in redeeming work; the redeemer of many bond slaves, the bringer of many sons to glory, cannot but have glory in and from his work, and be the object

of devout affection and honour to all who have been so immeasurably benefitted by him. We should be in danger in regard to such a creature benefactor, and that from the very constitution of our nature, of his coming betwixt us and the love and service which we owe to God. But if Christ be God, one with the Father in the love and wisdom which devised the plan of salvation ; one with the Father and the Holy Ghost, both in devising and in effecting the salvation of the many brethren given to Christ as the fruit of the travail of His soul, then all danger, whether in respect of the glory of God, or in regard to the duty of the creature, is averted, and there is glory to the Three One God in the highest, while there is good will toward men. Truly the problem of man's salvation is a great deep ; it had many, seemingly to man's wisdom, irreconcilable elements, not only as the case stood between man himself and God, but the very relation of God to fallen angels formed an element of no small weight and importance. The substitution for us, of Emmanuel, God with us, solved them all ; and if Christ was not God they remain unsolved to this hour.

It would not be very easy to say, whether the idea of salvation through creature mediation and atonement, or a free and absolutely unconditional act of mercy, is most dishonourable to the Divine character and injurious to the Divine law. In the latter case no creature comes between God and the dispensation of His grace, while in the other there is no adequate satisfaction whatever to the Divine law. But by either alternative the Divine Majesty would, we should pre-

sume in the apprehension of almost all men suffer loss. If it be asked, But is not the salvation of the sinner represented by the Gospel as absolutely free? Yes, we reply it is free to us, and in that consists its glory and our safety. But it had a condition, the fulfilment of which lay upon Christ; and it was a meritorious condition on His part—"If He shall make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see a seed, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hands." That was the condition which saved the majesty and honour of God, and which, while it magnified His law, magnified also His own great name. And even in regard to men there is a condition not of merit but of congruity; the condition, namely, not that he shall work so as to merit in some measure the bestowment of the salvation on him, but that he shall freely accept it as it is freely offered—the same condition upon which the man dying of starvation is restored to life, even that he take the proffered aliment which refusing he must inevitably perish; or upon which the impoverished man is restored to comfort, and to competence, namely, that he avail himself of the aid freely tendered by compassionate friends. No idea of meritoriousness ever enters into the mind of the spectator of such an act, and could hardly find admittance into the mind of the recipient himself, as assuredly it has no place in the act of kindness which is purely gratuitous. But all human comparison fails to do more than faintly shadow forth the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward men; no love or act of kindness as between man and man can be compared to the loving kindness of God towards the objects of His love, ex-

cept in the mere general principle. All the elements which go to make up the special acts are essentially not contrary but different.

Man's mercy is exhibited toward a fellow creature, a partaker of the same nature, a descendant of a common progenitor, one who in virtue of a common humanity has a claim upon him ; the mercy of God is that of Him who stands alone in His infinity and eternity, and in whom, in virtue of a common nature no claim could ever emerge. Man's mercy to his fellow-man is the fulfilment of an obligation laid upon him by the will of a superior, whose commandment carries the weight of an infinite obligation, and from which nothing can discharge him. God's mercy is the spontaneous act of His own grace and sovereign will. Man's mercy to his poor or erring brother may need to be requited, and may be requited, either by the participant of his mercy or by some other brother in his stead ; but a man cannot be profitable unto God, who having all fulness in Himself can receive of none. " If thou sinnest, what doest thou against Him ? " and " if thou be righteous, what givest thou Him ? " Man's mercy for the most part needs to be sought, and indeed in many instances to be urgently sought before it is obtained ; and herein the contrast with God's mercy is as great as in all the other instances, for He sought us when we sought not Him. Witness the case of our first parent, the first sinner of our race, there was palliation and recrimination, but no cry for mercy, and the entire experience of the race homologates the acts of the first transgressors. And then in regard to the largeness of the mercy, both in respect to the fre-

quency of its application and the extent of its reach, is not all comparison beggared here also? For the debt as between man and man is represented at its very utmost by the hundred pence, while the ten thousand talents of our debt to God are representative of an amount of indebtedness exceeding all computation of ours, "for who can tell how often he offendeth?"


And this is the kind of forgiveness which all men need at the hand of God, and it is the forgiveness which God, in offer at least (but in true and sincere offer) extends to all men—"Come now and let us reason together saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool." Who is not ready to say with David, "Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" And if the mercy received is not commensurate with the offer made, where shall the blame be found to lie? surely not with God who offers with all sincerity and never fails in fulfilment, even waiting that He may be gracious, but with man whether in proud disdain scorning the offer, or in contemptuous indifference neglecting it. But in the grand issue such an amount of actual forgiveness will be found in the redeemed out of every kindred and tongue and people and also seen in their vast numbers, even a multitude which no man can number as will justify and magnify the great act of redeeming love, and all the offers of mercy founded upon it. For it is mercy founded upon love and not mere compassion like too much of man's mercy; and still less is it mercy, vouchsafed like so

much of man's mercy, to mere importunity ; for of all those of whom it can be said that they love God, it must equally be said, "We love Him because He first loved us." We cannot on the one hand conceive of such a multitude of redeemed immortals by any interposition less than that of the Son of God, while on the other we cannot conceive of such a sacrifice of atonement as His was, without an issue that should glorify at once the love and the wisdom of God. We are accustomed to speak of any expenditure of human means as amply justified in their being made instrumental in winning a single soul to Christ ; and no doubt this is perfectly true, but if the expenditure of the same amount of means might, if wisely directed, have produced far greater results, then our Christian wisdom at least if not our piety has been at fault. For surely we are as much bound to work wisely for Christ as to work for Him at all. Only a certain definite amount of means is placed within the power of man, and he is not only bound to occupy with these means, but to do so prudently, and as one greedy of spiritual increase. To the principalities and powers in heavenly places is made known by the Church, not only the love, but the manifold wisdom of God. And herein, as well as in other things, we must be followers of God as dear children. The children of this world are wiser in this matter than the children of light ; and if in the hands of God's people the ten talents do not gain other ten, we are persuaded that the reason often is to be traced not so much to unfaithfulness, as to a lack of discretion or to mere inconsideration.

It is quite true that results are with God and from God, and that His dealings are all in absolute sovereignty, but they are not on that account to be regarded as capricious and independent of all reason ; but as resting on the deep foundation of an infinite wisdom which will in due time be justified in its every acting, and of all its children. The fact of the comparatively little success which attended our Lord's personal ministry has been often adverted to as one of the many subjects of wonder which met in His person and in His experience. And no doubt this does form one striking instance of the sovereignty of God the Father, as representing the persons of the one Godhead ; and at the same time a memorable instance of the entire submission of the Son to the will of the Father. Still there are decisions of the Divine will, instances of the Divine sovereignty more inscrutable than this. No doubt it was part of the humiliation to which the Son of God subjected Himself when He consented to become "a worm and no man," "a reproach of men and despised of the people." His was no unforeseen complaint when He said, "Who hath believed our report and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed ;" and no unexpected evil befell Him, when He found that of the people there was none with Him. He knew that He should have to tread the winepress alone, and that though He should see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied, He should have to wait for it, and therefore even He, believing, did not make haste.

But there was still more than this in the comparatively little fruit which attended the word of wisdom

at His mouth. He was willingly made in all things like to His brethren, and He was content to take a place, seemingly all unworthy of His inherent dignity (as indeed every place short of that of the throne of the universe would have been an obscuration of His essential dignity), but He did not seek even the highest place among His brethren, and so he willed that they should do greater works than He Himself had done. And who can tell how many a loving heart has been cheered and comforted by this very consideration, while working for Christ lovingly and assiduously, yet to all human appearance fruitlessly. As it is more difficult for the soul and a greater exercise of faith to follow God in the dark and cloudy day than when the heavens are declaring the glory of God; even so is the service of Christ comparatively easy when fruit is *seen* following the work, and the word is accompanied with demonstration of the Spirit and with power. But not every faithful labourer has this witness to his work from God; many a humble but zealous labourer has to work long, perhaps all his life long, even as he has to walk all his life, by faith. He knows that God's word shall not return to Him void, but he knows not whether shall prosper either this or that; still he knows that it is his part in obedience to Him who alone giveth the increase in the morning to sow the seed and in the evening to withhold not his hand, and so encouraged by the example of the Forerunner, and cheered by the remembrance of how it befell Him, and above all strengthened by the Spirit of Christ, he labours on prayerfully and hopefully that what he knows not now, he shall know



hereafter; and yet in due time hear the approval which shall satisfy him for ever, "Well done, good and faithful servant." It is true that every saved soul is a portion of the fruit of the travail of His soul, by whatever instrumentality that soul may have been won to God, and the entire honours of redemption of the multitude which no man can number will be all most justly His for ever: "Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood," will be the staple of the praise of the members of the Church triumphant in heaven but redeemed from the earth, for ever.

No doubt angels are as much indebted to the love of God for their seats of glory, and for the rivers of pleasure at which they drink continually, as are redeemed men. That is, both equally owe it to the benignity of God thus far, that it is of His sovereign love any one of them is what he is. And yet while it is equal in regard to both in respect of the freeness and sovereignty of God's love, that sovereignty has one aspect toward unfallen angels, and wholly another toward fallen man. To maintain the sinless is one thing, and a thing of grace; but to restore the sinful is a very different though not a contrary thing: both acts are acts of benignity and love, but into the one a mercy must enter which was not necessary in the other. And to creature intelligence the mercy would appear so to conflict with justice and righteousness, as to appear utterly irreconcilable. And created intelligence never could have devised a reconciliation. But while the marvellous *wisdom* which found out the ransom, should be, and will be a theme of eternal praise to God both from angels and men, the *grace* of

the ransom will form the peculiar subject of praise to God on the part of the redeemed for ever: peculiar we say, but not restricted to them, for have they not all one Father, and is it not of Christ that the *whole* family in heaven and earth is named; and if men on earth, though only partially purified, should and do give God thanks for the grace bestowed on any of their fellows, shall holy angels have no praise to offer to the one common Lord and Father of all, for the most wondrous exhibition of Divine grace and love that ever was or probably ever will be made to the intelligent creation. All this glory to God in the highest is through Christ, and still we cannot help feeling that, in the comparatively little fruit which He Himself with the eyes of His mortal flesh saw, we have a pregnant instance of His entire submission to the sovereign will of His heavenly Father, of the perfection of His weakness and humiliation, and of the patience wherewith He can at once forbear toward men, and wait for the reward which was and is to crown His work.

Those who deny the Divinity of Christ, for the most part deny everything in the shape of Atonement, and are so far consistent; indeed the two doctrines are so harmonious, and in truth so dependent the one upon the other, that it is impossible to entertain anything like adequate views of the holiness of God on the one side, and of the demerit of sin on the other, and at the same time entertain the idea that real and proper Atonement is within creature competency. The thorough denial of Atonement therefore is the only truly consistent course. Com-

plete consistency, however, demands rejection of the Bible as a revelation from God: for Christ is in the Bible, and the death of Christ, and Christ living, dying, rising, and ascending, is the great all-pervading subject of the Bible from the beginning to the end, the testimony to Jesus being the very spirit of prophecy. Yet there are men who profess to receive the Bible as in some sense the word of God, who also acknowledge to find Christ in it, but merely as an example. Now we make bold to say that if Jesus Christ was man and nothing more than man, and was at the same time a holy sinless man, then He is an example indeed, but of something very different from that of which such parties hold Him forth as an example. He might indeed, then, according to Unitarian doctrine, be an example of a good man labouring for the good of his fellow men, and of the meekness and patience and resignation wherewith a good man can suffer, but what becomes all this while of the character of God in permitting such bitter abasement and such cruel suffering to overtake a perfectly sinless and holy man. It would be an instance, we presume, without parallel in the whole administration of the universe of God. We should then have a pregnant example of the innocent perishing, of the righteous cut off. If it be said that, though the instance of Jesus may be allowed to be an extreme, it is not a solitary case, for that many of the excellent of the earth have perished by unjust judgment, and very many because of their attachment to and in defence of the truth of God. But not one of them was or claimed to be a perfectly holy and sinless

man ; holy, no doubt many of them were, in the conventional use of the term, by which a man is designated by the prevailing bent of his mind, and the prevailing bias in the mind of every renewed man is toward holiness ; but we have no sinless martyrs to truth, save one, even Jesus, who was the truth. And if He was not something far more than a martyr to truth, then, in His person, the justice and righteousness of God stand impeached.

But He was more, and His heaven-imposed name, Jesus, carried in it the purpose of His appearing in our world, and the justification of His death, not at the hand of man, but in the appointment of God. Guilt supposed, and the penalty of death admitted as that which has been attached by God to sin (and no man can pretend to believe the Bible as even in the most modified sense a revelation from God without admitting this), then the very name Jesus bears within itself the sentence of death to Him who bears it. But we have Joshua bearing the same name with Jesus, who is called Christ ; for Joshua in Hebrew is the same name with Jesus in Greek, and the name seems to bear the meaning of one whose salvation Jehovah is, rather than one who is the saviour of others. In reply, we answer Joshua was a type of Christ ; and as Jesus was to lead His people into the heavenly land of promise, so Joshua was appointed of God, in preference even to Moses, to lead Israel into the land of their earthly heritage. We do not doubt that Joshua had his name as well as his appointment to his work by the ordination of God ; and as little do we doubt

that of all the men who ever lived, Jesus was one whose salvation was of God ; but then, however restricted may be the meaning of the name in its original application, in regard to Jesus, the Christ, not only was the name given Him by God, but a reason for it extensive of its original meaning, a reason which applied, and could apply to no other—" He shall be called Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." Joshua died at the good old age of a hundred and ten years, having been honoured of God and respected by men. Jesus Christ was cut off in the very prime of His earthly days, despised and rejected of men ; and by a death respecting which God Himself had said, " Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Was there nothing more in the death of Jesus than in that of Joshua except the mere outward circumstances ? We presume they are but few who could believe that. If so, what mean those signs from heaven which carried conviction to the heart of the Roman Centurion, and drew from him the confession that this man was the Son of God ; signs which smote to the heart the unthinking multitude, and made them smite their breasts as they returned from witnessing a death—the like to which earth never saw nor will see. Innumerable martyrs have died since Christ did, but no signs from heaven bore witness to the sympathy which doubtless was felt in heaven for them. If it should be said or thought that His resurrection from the dead, to die no more, was a sufficient recompense of His life of unblemished holiness, and His death of unmerited ignominy and suffering, we ask in reply,

in what was He inferior to Enoch who was translated that he should not see death, and was not found because God took him ; or to Elijah, who without tasting of death went up in the chariot of fire with its horses of fire direct to heaven ?

No doubt the Man of Sorrows went up too—" God is gone up with a shout, Jehovah with the sound of a trumpet ;" and Daniel, in prophetic vision, saw Him in the night visions—" And behold one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him." All this is truth, most blessed truth ; but before He entered upon this beginning of His glory, He had to drink a cup which neither the hands of Enoch nor of Elijah could have borne up.

It has often been remarked that the martyrs for the truth (emphatically the martyrs for Jesus), men and women, old men ready to die of very age, and young women in the very spring-tide of their days, to whom life could have been no wearisome burden, met death amid outward terrors more trying to flesh and blood than those who waited upon the cross of the Son of Man, and met it with an unflinching fortitude which compelled the admiration even of their persecutors. But we find Jesus confessing " Now is My soul troubled," and " My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Surely there was something in His cup which was in none other ever put into the hands of man. And here lay the bitterness, " My God ! My God ! why hast Thou forsaken Me ?" Were Jesus nothing more than an example of what man should be in his life, and of how a good man should meet

death; then, if this was all, while we admit that He was unique in His life, we feel constrained to say that in death He has been surpassed by many of His followers,—followers too, who professed to have derived all their fortitude from Him, followers who amid death by fire and by flood, by the halter and by wild beasts of the earth; yes, death, even in more fearful forms than these, exhibited such a holy and sublime elevation above the king of terrors when clothed in the most fearful of all his modes of approach to man, as to reflect marvellous glory upon Him by whom they were sustained and upheld, if He was indeed the Son of God—but assuredly nothing of this if He was the Son of Man and nothing more. We almost tremble while we write, if He was man and only man, is not His glory as a good man suffering death eclipsed by men, young and old, yes and by maidens too. But let His cup carry the guilt of man in it, let His death bear the character of Atonement, and all becomes plain; the difference between His death and that of His followers is explained—“By His stripes they were healed.”

Start from what point you please, whether in the character of God or of the Man Christ Jesus, you are met by insoluble difficulties till you admit the idea of Atonement, and then, so far at least as the character of God is concerned, and the character and sufferings of Christ are concerned, all becomes plain. We do not say that we are brought even near to a comprehension of the mystery of the Divine nature, of three persons subsisting in the unity of the Divine essence; or of the mystery of the two natures subsisting in the

one person of the Son of God, Himself the second person in the one glorious Godhead. But we do say that Atonement, and Atonement alone, solves the mystery of God's righteousness in conjunction with man's salvation; and the mystery of the only sinless being on earth, a homeless wanderer during life, and in death at once the greatest sufferer, and the object of man's fiercest hatred. God has signally interfered long before now, on behalf of good men suffering wrongfully. He did it before the days of Jesus Christ, and He has done it since. He did it very markedly on behalf of Noah; He did it on behalf of Lot; and signally also on behalf of His servant and prophet Daniel. And since the day of Christ He did it on behalf of Peter, and also on behalf of Paul and Silas; but there was no deliverance for the Lord and Master of them all. Job was a signal instance of a good man (that is of a man good, in the restricted sense in which any mere man can be called good,) enduring affliction in a great measure by way of example. We say in a great measure, because it was not wholly and entirely so; for without doubt Job had a personal interest in the calamities which were permitted to fall upon him, not only in respect of the blessings which followed upon his patient endurance, but also in respect of personal purification and growth in grace—"The Lord afflicteth not willingly, but for our profit that we may be partakers of His holiness."

We allow that the Lord Jesus as Son of Man had a personal interest in His sufferings, for by reason of them He was to see a seed which should prolong their days, to see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.


But in respect of personal purification He had no interest in them. He who was "holy, harmless, and undefiled," needed no purification whatever: He who was the Father's well beloved, in whom His soul delighted, was not deficient in any grace nor in any measure of any grace, so as to need a filling up of that which was behind: He who could challenge the world to convict Him of sin, had no fruit in the way of personal purity to look for in recompense of His sufferings. Therefore if He was mere man His death by way of example has been equalled (we should hesitate to say surpassed) by very many who drew all their faith, fulness, and strength of endurance from Him, while His reward as a mere witness of the truth stands out in our estimation in wholly disproportionate requital as compared with all the witnesses for the truth who preceded or who followed Him. Let it not be forgotten that we are not denying or doubting His true and proper humanity: that is as true, and so far as the justice and righteousness of God in our salvation is concerned, as necessary as His true and proper Divinity. But while Divinity could not suffer, mere humanity could not save: hence the need of a being at once Divine and human. We know that the great mystery of godliness is at once offensive to the pride of the human heart, and foolishness to the self-sufficiency of the human understanding; and indeed very naturally so with the miserably defective and God-dishonouring ideas which so many entertain regarding sin. For if sin be so slight an evil between God and His creatures, so diminutive a blot upon God's creation, that a mere act of mercy in sovereignty can

forgive the guilt and eradicate the stain, then the incarnation of Jesus Christ and Atonement by the death on the Cross cannot be maintained in consistency with the wisdom of God. Then the preaching of Christ crucified is indeed a stumblingblock and foolishness.

Men thus get rid of one mystery indeed, and it the great mystery of godliness, but there will not thus be one mystery the less in the world ; many others will take its place. We allow it to be a mystery, a great mystery, but it is the solvent of many mysteries in the world around us and in almost our daily life. Wherefore then, if sin be as small a matter in the sight of God as it is in the estimation of many among us, have we death reigning not from Adam to Moses only, but from Adam to this hour, over young and old, rich and poor, free and bond ? There is no clime on earth ignorant of death—and not death only, but death in every form ; from that of the long lingering disease, to that of the instantaneous severance between soul and body ; death by tortures which make the flesh creep to think of them, and all the more painful to think of as generally the unhallowed vengeance of man upon his fellow man, down to the death which is but a long drawn sigh, or like a falling on sleep as gently as the dew falls upon the grass. Yet, in whatever form it comes, it is death still, and confessedly the enemy of man. And if there be any who have no bands in their death, they are as often the wicked as the righteous, it would seem as if in the days of the Psalmist more often. Now death, considered apart from its being God's visitation for sin,

and His judgment threatened on account of it, is a mystery quite insoluble under the dominion of a God Almighty, and wise and good as He is mighty ; nor will even the consideration of its being God's judgment for sin solve the mystery if sin be so slight an evil as either that God can remit it without Atonement, or that every man can by his own suffering make sufficient reparation to the honour of God and of His law. For, notwithstanding all that men have to endure in the course of the present mortal life (and many have to carry a heavy weight of sorrows), life is to the vast majority not only endurable, but death is a subject of fear and of bondage. Men are not easily nor soon brought to say of life with Job, " My soul chooseth strangling and death, rather than my life ; I loathe it, I would not live alway." The pains of the present life then, can with no propriety be looked upon as the adequate Atonement for its sins, else men would not be so loathe to quit that life. This is true, independent of the fact, that many of the very worst men have had fewest of its sorrows. But, it may be said, it is not the love of life as possessed in this world which makes men cling to it, nor yet so much the fear of the pains of dying as the fear of what may follow after death. To this it is obvious to reply, what else is this very fear than the award of conscience by way of premonition, that the wages of sin is death, and that something more, something better than the death of the sinner is needed to make a conscience-satisfying Atonement ?

It is, alas, too true that many build their hope of security in the world to come, some on the hardships



of the poverty of their lot in this life, some on their personal or relative afflictions, and this on the ground that in their view it would be something like injustice in God to make them sufferers both here and hereafter. They thus regard God as in some way debtor to them, quite as much as they are debtors to God. Much of this language is no doubt heard while death is regarded as at a distance, but sometimes also when death is near and evidently felt to be near. It is wonderful how, when men have loved darkness rather than light, and have long listened to the suggestions of their own carnal minds, they come at length to believe the lie with which they spoke peace to themselves, and from hoping it might be true, come at length to trust in it as true. But there are others who can draw hope for the future life from a source the very opposite of this, and because God has been kind to them here, trust that, notwithstanding all their forgetfulness of Him, and of a life spent literally without Him in the world, to-morrow, that is the to-morrow of the future life shall be as this day and much more abundant. Witness the case recorded by Foster in his essay on popular ignorance, of the yeoman who, on his death-bed, expressed his hope in God's mercy, purely on the ground that God had been very kind to him here in giving him many good crops—therefore he felt quite satisfied that he might just trust on in the same mercy. But hopes so diversely founded can surely be hardly conceived as both well founded: and if Scripture be true both are foundations of sand.

To one or other of these, however, we are fairly shut

up if we reject the idea of Atonement by the death of Christ, unless we are willing to trust ourselves to a foundation more untrustworthy if possible than even these—the foundation namely of our own merit, even as in the sight of God. For it is not by the estimate of our character which our fellowmen form, but its estimate by God, that we have to stand or fall. There are indeed men so openly and outrageously wicked, that in the language of Scripture their sins may be said to “go before them to judgment,” but alas! there are far more who have a good report of men, and of whom nevertheless it may be said that their sins follow after them. Bad as must be admitted to be the condition of the first description of character, who, if he could help it, would willingly come into the second? But in the one or the other, all must be found if the grace of God has provided no refuge for us, or if we have been too proud in our self-sufficiency to avail ourselves of its shelter. For is it possible for any human being to believe that he is without sin, or that having sinned it is yet quite within his competence so to live that, on the footing of mere justice, he is entitled to an act of amnesty? But if even through the blindness of his mind he could persuade himself to this extent (and we are persuaded that very few can get even this length) a harder task is still before him. He has only got so far as to be able to say, “I am an unprofitable servant, I have done that which was my duty to do;” we envy not the moral state of the man who feels thus in regard to himself. But if there is anything probationary or disciplinary in the constitution of our relationship to God in

this world, who that ever lived on earth dare say that his probationary constitution has been so met, and with such fidelity as to entitle him to claim, not only exemption from blame and of course from every thing like punishment, but a title to life eternal. As the conceptions in regard to sin are miserably defective on the part of those who imagine that by their good deeds (deeds good as they regard them) they can balance the demerit of the things wherein they have done amiss; still more defective is the view of the Divine character, and of their own character on the part of those, if indeed any such there be, who think they can claim heaven and God's favour as a matter of mere right and simple justice. This would be indeed strong delusion, only inferior to that of Popery with its supererogatory merit, by which a man may not only earn heaven for himself, but have a surplus store of merit to expend on those who have come short for themselves. We believe that angels themselves stand in and through grace—grace no doubt in some respect differing as to the unfallen from that which has respect to the fallen. The grace of maintenance must be in some respect different from that of restoration. But it was the benignity of God that moved Him to create angels; it was His favour that so endowed them that they were able to stand in their high estate; and it is His grace that crowns their fidelity with eternal glory and blessedness. If this be true, what possible ground for boasting can there be on the part of man? The very idea is derogatory to man's understanding, as it must be most offensive in the sight of God.

We presume that few indeed if ever any have been found blind enough to what passes within their own hearts, or to what passes around them in the world to deny the palpable truth, "That there is no man that liveth and sinneth not." And if again that other Scriptural declaration be true that God chargeth even His angels with folly, however much or however little of defectibility we may be disposed to attach to the expression, we then seem to be shut up to two things —first, the need of Atonement for man's sinfulness ; and then equally the need of a Divine Mediator to meet the requirements of the Divine honour and the infinite reach of the Divine law. Thus the Unitarian is consistent, when maintaining Atonement to be superfluous, he denies the Divinity of Jesus Christ. But he is not consistent when he affirms Jesus Christ to have been sent of God to promulgate the holiest system of doctrine which the world ever saw, and to lead the only perfect life of which the world ever heard, and then by way of still further example seal His doctrine with His blood. For it is obvious that His doctrine needed no such seal when regarded as a system of duty, for it has commended itself to the approbation both of believer and unbeliever. And it has been well remarked that mankind did not so much need a revelation of moral truth (though this it is conceded was also much required) as a sure medium by which conscience could be pacified for past sin, and a source of strength opened up for the future. But nothing of this was done by Christ if He was a mere man working out His own duty toward God, fulfilling His own course for His own benefit, and

aiding His fellowmen solely by the effect of His example. We are not disposed to deny or to hold lightly the efficacy of example on the part of the teachers of mankind, for in truth precept never carries such a weight of argument as when the argument lies in the force of a consistent example. And never was precept enforced in this respect as were the precepts of Christ, "who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." But alas! the power of even a stainless example will not force itself into the soul of the witnesses of that example so as to cleanse them from the guilt of past sin, and there is no instance of its having ever availed to produce by its mere power as an example a life of sinless obedience for the future. The example then which we are taught to look for in Jesus Christ as the all which we are warranted to expect from Him remains unique, and solitary in its unapproachable grandeur. We most readily admit the unspeakable indebtedness under which the world lies to the appearing of Christ in our world, and that innumerable have been benefitted by it through its effect on the characters of those with whom they have been in any way connected; and not only so, but also in respect of the amelioration of their own character, of whom it is to be feared that as this was all they sought—namely, a present good—so it is all they have obtained.

But blessed be God there are innumerable others who not only readily admit all the temporal good which both directly and indirectly they have received from and through Christ, but who profess to have received from Him a complete transformation of their

spiritual nature—whose relation to God has been changed by Him, in so much that, whereas they were at one time “enemies to God in their minds and by wicked works,” they are now in Christ reconciled. Their relation to the world to come is also changed; for, though they can and do enjoy a present world more than they did when that world was their all, yet they now feel their true citizenship to be in heaven, and by life and conduct declare that they are pilgrims and strangers here. All this does not make them dead to the duties of this life, or careless of their own proper interests, or of those of their friends in it, but, by the grace of God, it enables them to live as though in the world, yet not of the world. It is evident that the present is something to them, but then it is as evident that the future is much more. The opposite of all this is the case of the men of the world; the present is so much to them, that if they could they would reverse Job’s words, so that, while he would not, they, if they could, would live always. The motto of the believer in Christ is, “*in hope of eternal life*,” and in this faith and hope he endures as seeing Him who is invisible; how different the condition of the man whose all, or at least all whose desire is comprised within the bounds of the visible and temporal. It is recorded of Dr. Johnson, that Goliath in human literature (and of whom, blessed be God, we have reason to believe that he became a little child at the feet of Jesus), that one day, walking through the pleasure grounds of Garrick, perhaps as celebrated an actor as ever trod the boards of a theatre, and being led by his friend from one beauty to an-

other, and from one statue to another, he laid his brawny hand on the shoulder of his little friend, saying, "Oh! David, David, these are the things which make a death-bed terrible." And so they are when they make up the soul's possession; and yet, in the keeping of a Christian heart, they are only exhibitions of the power, and wisdom, and goodness of our heavenly Father, who has given us all things richly to enjoy, but who will not suffer them to withdraw the hearts of His children from Him. And this is quite in accordance with the saying of the apostle, "All things are yours."

But we would return for a little to the idea of Atonement, as we believe this idea underlies the whole Bible, and that, if you withdraw this idea, much of it becomes not only unmeaning, but positively misleading; and, indeed, there are very few, if any, who have ever thought of God in His holiness, and of man in his corruption, but have entertained the idea in some shape, however erroneously. Yet a gulf, wide and deep indeed, lies between those who hold the offender's personal atonement as sufficient to satisfy the law and justice of God, and those who hold the necessity of a vicarious atonement. So far as we can see, the appearance of Jesus Christ in the world was, in respect of the one view, altogether supererogatory, the sinner's ability to atone being wholly untouched by it; whereas, in the other view, the manifestation of Christ in the flesh is the very essence of atonement—His death in that flesh which alone could suffer death, being in itself the very atonement which, while it sets the believing sinner free, at the same time

magnifies God's law, and makes it honourable. The opponents of the vicarious atonement of Christ affirm that repentance is sufficient to satisfy the righteous indignation of God against sin, and to replace the sinner in that favour of God from which he by transgression fell. Let us say that repentance does not atone for sin in the eyes of human law, nor has God commanded that it should, for He has put a sword into the hand of the magistrate to be exercised in the way of terror to, and to punish evil-doers. Quite true it is that we are required individually to forgive our erring brother upon his repentance, even until seventy times seven. Good reason there is for one erring man, who needs so much forgiveness at the hand of God, forgiving, and being required to forgive, an erring fellow-sinner. But public justice stands upon wholly a different footing, and no justice is so public, so wholly rectoral as that of God which has respect not only to our world but to all worlds.

He is a bold man who can put such trust as this in the efficacy of repentance, that on account of it, even were it true repentance, God should wipe out alike the guilt of the young and of the hoary-headed sinner. We say true repentance, for there is much that is called by the name which has in it nothing of the reality. Sorrow of heart, or vexation of spirit, because I have brought ruin upon myself is not repentance, for it is not so much the course that led to the ruin which I regret, as the ruin itself. Insomuch is this true, that, if the ruin could be avoided, the self same course would be greedily followed; examples of this kind of repentance are far from being rare, but are

exemplified in every instance where the hand of repression having been withdrawn, the dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire. True repentance is quite as much, if not more, a loathing of the sin than fear of the punishment. Where true repentance is, there would be no return to the sin though the punishment due to it were abolished. Such is evangelical repentance, and it is as much the gift of God as the pardon of sin itself. This repentance, together with the remission of sin, Christ is exalted to bestow—and they are twin graces in the believer's experience, inseparably united, though the one is a grace wrought in him, and the other a grace brought to him—where there is evangelical repentance, there is remission of sin, and where there is remission of sin, there is true repentance—what God hath joined, nor man nor devil can put asunder. Yet there are mourning believers who, because they cannot realize the presence of the one grace, naturally doubt their right to the other—they walk in darkness, and have no light; what are they to do? It is a blessed thing, and one of the innumerable proofs of the Divinity of the Scriptures that He who knows the end from the beginning has foreseen, and in His Fatherly loving-kindness provided for this also—"Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." Thus there may be evangelical repentance and darkness, doubt, despondency, but there cannot be this repentance without remission of sin; and so the believer is always safe though he is not always assured within himself of his safety. There is much of grace in such a

declaration of the Word of God, looking at human nature as we find it in this world ; and there is wisdom too, for so it is, let men account for it as they may, that God's people are sometimes found walking in darkness ; perhaps all, certainly we believe the greater number know more or less of this, at some period or other of their Christian course. We know that there are some who say that they know nothing of this, and who speak of it as casting much suspicion upon the Christian profession. Well may we say with David, " Let me fall into the hand of God ; and let me not fall into the hand of man," for the Lord's compassions are indeed great.

But David's trust in the mercifulness of God had respect to Atonement, the great doctrine for which we contend. Else, what meant the altar and the sacrifice in the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite ? But it is really idle to talk in this way, for sacrifice pervades the Old Testament economy from the beginning to the end ; and the New begins with the sacrifice of the Lamb of God which has abolished for ever all sacrifice, except that of the broken and contrite heart, which is a living sacrifice, evermore acceptable to God. We are not aware that ever a people has been discovered who had any sense, we do not say of God—for of the true God many peoples had no knowledge whatever—but of a supernatural power or powers without manifesting that sense, and at the same time a sense of their own need of propitiation by sacrifices of some sort, and often of the most revolting character, even of human sacrifices. There are only two ways by which the origin of these sacri-

fices can be accounted for—either they are the corrupted remains of an original and early revelation, or they are the spontaneous expression of the natural conscience testifying of sin and groping after reconciliation. We do not think that we should be far wrong were we to say that both elements enter into the explanation, for there evidently was an original revelation in regard to sacrifice, and there is in the consciences of all men, sooner or later, and in more or less degree, a conviction of sin which calls aloud for sacrifice. Thus, if the idea was purely of Divine origination, as we have no doubt it was, it seems to have been kept alive by a conscience of sin within the human frame, when possibly other subjects of Divine revelation failed to be conserved beyond the bounds of the Jewish family.

Men have spoken of Atonement as reflecting upon the character of God, as a diminution of His character of grace and beneficence. But no charge could be more unfounded than this; for if His justice required Atonement, His own grace provided it; and had He not done so, there was not value nor power within created might to have accomplished it—"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." If men would only suffer God to care for His own character, and take it from His own lips, they would soon find it to be true, "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified." Surely there is something far more wonderful, far more glorious, in a grace that saves to the very uttermost, combined with a justice that is like the great mountains, than in a mercy that can be ex-

exercised only at the expense of justice and truth. The one exalts the character of God in all its attributes, we do not like to say what the other would do.

The idea of Atonement has been objected to on the ground that it has too much the appearance of a barter and sale transaction, too much the appearance of an equivalent, or a *quid pro quo* transaction. But the truth is that the man who can regard it in this light, just betrays his utter ignorance of the subject on which he dares thus dogmatically to pronounce. It must be true, for Scripture says it, "That without shedding of blood is no remission," and natural conscience coincides with the declaration of Scripture when it thus speaks, and also in a great measure when it further declares that the blood of bulls and of goats could never take away sin; but then it is equally true of all creature blood, of everything in the shape of creature atonement. Even creature atonement falls too far short in the very utmost value that can be attached to it, to be regarded in the light of equivalent; while on the other hand the Atonement accomplished by the life and death of the God Man Christ Jesus far surpasses every idea of mere equivalent, and places this wondrous transaction on the one hand between the Father and the Son, and on the other between God and His guilty creatures in a category by itself, so far as we know, in the records of eternity itself. Christ's whole life, from His conception in the womb to His resurrection from the dead, was one life-long sacrifice of three and thirty years, the culminating point of which was His agony in the garden, and His death upon the cross. But so much

more than a mere equivalent was that sacrifice, that it not only availed for the eternal salvation of a multitude which no man can number, but to exalt Him and to give Him a name which is above every name. If there is not divinity here as well as humanity, we are involved in inextricable perplexities ; of the humanity we are sure for divinity cannot suffer, and Christ did suffer ; but if we have not divinity also, then from the very constitution of our nature, the exceeding and eternal weight of obligation under which Christ has laid us, almost necessarily involve us in the guilt of idolatry. What redeemed soul could fail to worship the Son even as they worship the Father, and it is only if Christ spake true when He said, "I and My Father are one," that we are saved from this danger, and from this guilt. The redemption which for ever exalts the name of Jesus, will for ever glorify the Father and the Holy Ghost, and be the theme of creature thanksgiving and praise to the triune Jehovah through everlasting ages.

Therefore, "unto Him who loved us, and made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory for ever and ever, Amen !"

Another objection made to Atonement and its kindred doctrine of free and full remission by the atoning blood of the Lamb of God, under which is of course included His spotless holy life, without any thing of merit in any shape, or in any degree on the part of the saved creature, is that it is inimical, at least in its tendency, to holiness of life on the part of men, and looking to man as we find him and know him to be, to render him indifferent to purity of con-

duct by reason of the security it holds out to him for the merits of another. And if the redemption of Christ did nothing more for man than secure his safety, there would be too good ground for such an argument. But the objection is founded, as almost all the objections against Bible doctrine are, in utter ignorance of the Gospel. No doubt there are objections to that doctrine which have a worse source than even ignorance. Yet we believe the doctrine is often objected to, as in the opinion of the objector leading, or having a tendency to lead to licentiousness, from pure ignorance of the nature of the Gospel, and from thoughtlessness of the nature of God on the one hand and of the nature of man on the other. No doubt God is conceived of as holy, but then He is not conceived of as *so* holy, as not only that He cannot look upon sin, but not on the sinner either apart from an atonement for sin, and no convinced sinner ever yet conceived that repentance was an adequate atonement for sin. And then in regard to the nature of man, a forgiveness that is to the sinner free, given without money and without price, is the strongest of all inducements to love, and love is the fulfilling of the law. While if appeal is made to experience, the most devoted obedience, the hardest (that is the closest, most earnest,) following after God, will, as a matter of unfailing notoriety, be found among those who hold Scriptural teaching to be that man is "justified by faith without the works of the law." The objection at the first blush, and perhaps apart from experience is natural enough; but He who knew what was in man, knew better. And so even in fallen man

love is found to be a principle of greater power than fear ; love for deliverance is more powerful than love for obedience, or even fear for the consequences of disobedience.

No little controversy has arisen upon the question for whom Christ made Atonement, and that too between parties of great intelligence on either side, and both equally zealous for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Both hold the value of the Atonement offered by Christ to be infinite, and to be limited in its application only by the will of God ; for both equally hold the doctrine of sovereign election. One would think there was not much room for difference in the result, where these premises were held in common ; and in point of fact so far as we see there is really no difference in the result—the question turning mainly on points of Biblical interpretation, but which are at the same time held to involve the honour of God according as they are decided in the one way or the other. The question is, Did Christ atone for all who fell in Adam, or for the elect only ? This in few words is the point in dispute. Though the one view is designated Universal Atonement, yet the parties holding this view, are as far as the others from holding universal restoration.

Both parties agree in holding that not a delusive but a true and honest offer is made by God in the Gospel of eternal life to all who will receive it by believing in Him whom God hath sent ; and so Jesus puts the rejection by the Jews of life and salvation upon their rejection of Him, and their rejection of Him He puts upon the determination of their own will,

“Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life,” So far there is no difference between the parties, both agree in holding that it is this honest offer of life and salvation to every sinner under heaven which makes the Gospel “glad tidings of great joy to all people.” But then it is affirmed on the one side, that in order to afford a foundation for this universality of offer, the Atonement must possess an equal universality, or else the offer of life to those for whom Christ made no Atonement has no foundation on which to rest, and so far as man can see must be delusive. On the other hand the opponents of this doctrine hold the idea to be monstrous and incredible, that Christ should have died, and died in *bona fides* for any who, notwithstanding shall come short of eternal life, for if so, then in so far Christ died in vain. To this however it is answered that Christ did not die in vain, even in respect of those who ultimately perish; for that the honour of God as the Great Governor not only among the nations, but over all worlds is conserved and even magnified, whilst His loving-kindness to His creatures, His children of the human family, is exalted and glorified; and at the same time we cannot tell the bearing of all this upon the intelligent creation of God throughout the manifold worlds which show forth the glory of God throughout the regions of infinite space.

And here it is entirely pertinent to ask, upon what ground, if the Atonement be universal, the restoration is limited, for both parties are agreed as to this limitation? And to this it is replied that the universal Atonement has in the purpose of God a limited desti-

nation. All agree that it is limited to those who believe, and the parties to whose views we are now alluding both agree that "faith is the gift of God," and that no man can come to Christ "except the Father who sent Him draw him." Thus both agree in salvation being a matter of pure grace from first to last, so that no flesh can glory in God's presence; all that the Father hath given to Christ shall come to Him, and no other can or will. To us the difference seems to be reduced to almost microscopic dimensions, both parties seem to be travelling on parallel lines, and they both arrive at one conclusion, that grace alone makes one man to differ from another; both hide pride from man, and give glory to God alone. Surely this ought to put an end to all bitter words, mitigate an unbecoming dogmatism, and make them content to agree to differ on so small a matter, till the clear light of the better day shall dispel the shadows of our ignorance by making us to know even as we are known.

The question is one which can be decided only by Scripture, and to Scripture both sides appeal. And when we regard the intelligence which is arrayed on both sides, and so far as man can judge the purity of motive, it becomes still more evident that to impute motives is uncandid and unbecoming the meekness which should characterize the followers of Christ. It is allowed by both that in the mediatorship of Christ a foundation is laid for the unlimited offer of salvation to all the ends of the earth, that none are excluded from the acceptance of it by God, and that in the day of grand decision none will be excluded from the

life eternal but those only who excluded themselves. Scripture is plain enough in its offer of life ; plain enough in regard to the ground on which the offer is made, namely the righteousness and atoning death of the Lamb of God as that by which alone the sin of the world is taken away ; plain enough as to the way in which a sinner becomes reconciled unto God, even by believing on the name of the only begotten Son of God ; plain enough in its declarations that "No man can call Jesus Lord but by the Holy Ghost ; and plain enough in its promise that God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. We may be very sure, that if God holds out the offer of salvation to all men, it is a true and sincere offer, and that it has a foundation on which to rest, which at once conserves the truth and honour of God, and leaves the loss of life chargeable on the sinner himself alone, and in no way or degree upon God.

The unlimited atonement with a limited destination, perhaps as little clears up the difficulties of this, certainly one of the deep things of God, as does Christ's dying for the elect only while the offer of salvation in virtue of the efficacy of the death of Christ, is commanded to be made to all the world. Adopt either theory, and difficulties to us insoluble remain to be reconciled. But we are not called to reconcile them, and assuredly we shall not get rid of perhaps greater difficulties by rejecting both. For if any man is resolved that he will believe nothing that is not made level to the comprehension of his reason, nothing which he cannot fully comprehend and reconcile, he must at once sink into the lowest depths

of scepticism and doubt of everything. There has been writing on this subject, namely, the extent of the Atonement, either in such a spirit of bitterness or superciliousness or both, as makes it very painful reading, if indeed one can read it at all. A spirit of self-satisfied conviction of the truth of one's own opinions we would never think of complaining of, for if a man is not satisfied as to the truth of his opinions, they should not form part of his convictions. But this is a very different thing from looking down with contempt upon every divergence from his line of thought and conviction, and very different indeed from that fiery zeal which characterises almost every such divergence as an assured swerving from the truth of God, and an utter subversion of that truth. Right it is that every man shall be fully persuaded in his own mind, but it is not right that he should charge consequences upon a differing opinion which do not necessarily flow from it, and which the maintainers of that opinion utterly repudiate and reject with as much abhorrence as those who charge these consequences upon them. Such parties are often found very magisterially announcing their own views, very dogmatically condemning those of their opponents as contradictory of reason or of Scripture, and with great complacency assuming the truth of their own dogma without condescending to notice or apparently even to believe that they are exposed to any objection worthy of notice. They seem to forget that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God, and that mere confident assertion proves nothing. The spirit of love is the most likely to reclaim the erring,

and in accordance with this is the Scripture precept, "Ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness."

We are not disposed to say of this controversy in regard to the extent of the Atonement, that it is a mere logomachy, a distinction without a difference, and far less should we say so in regard to any view of the nature and efficacy of the death of Christ which might even seem to involve ultimate universal restoration, for which, as we believe, there is no warrant whatever in Scripture. Any view of the doctrine of Atonement which by fair inference involved that conclusion would in our view by that very fact stand convicted of error; and we say further that any view of that doctrine which even naturally tended in that direction would be liable to be regarded with just suspicion. The doctrine of Universal Atonement, but with limited destination in the purpose of God, has been charged with this tendency. Whether rightly or wrongly so charged, we do not feel competent to say—at any rate the charge is strenuously denied by the maintainers of that theory. It has been said by way of formula that Christ died sufficiently for all, but efficiently for the elect; and if by dying sufficiently for all be merely meant that His death had a sufficiency of value in it to atone for the sins of the whole world, had it been the purpose of God to save the whole world, few will be hardy enough to doubt its truth; it is only when it is held as implying that Christ did in any sense die for the non-elect that objection would be made to it.

The argument between the two parties may be

stated briefly as follows :—On the one side it is said that when men are called upon to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ that they may be saved, this is an offer of salvation upon their believing, and that this offer must have a foundation in the satisfaction made by Christ to God's character and God's law. On the other side it is affirmed that if Christ died for the unsaved, He in so far died in vain ; and that God demands satisfaction again from many sinners for whom Christ died to atone, both of which consequences they declare to be injurious to the honour both of the Father and of the Son. Neither alternative is without difficulty, but we are sure that we are safe and in full accord with Scripture in holding—

First, That in the death of Christ there is a foundation laid upon which the Gospel may be preached to every creature in all the world, and so honestly and frankly preached that whosoever believes shall not perish, but have everlasting life ; and all this in most perfect consistency with the truth of God, and the honour of His law.

Second, That Christ shall see in so many of the travail of His soul, as to be therewith fully satisfied ; while in those who perish through unbelief, He will not in regard to them have died in vain so far as His own glory or His own purpose are concerned. For we cannot conceive contingency possible in regard to such an event as the death of Christ and its results ; as indeed with God there is no contingency in any matter at all.

Third, That Christ did make full satisfaction for all who believe on His name, and that God will demand

no satisfaction by way of atonement for sins of theirs. He may and often does manifest His holy hatred of sin by visiting the iniquity even of His own people with the rod, and with the stripes of the children of men. His holiness and their correction, that they may be partakers of His holiness, requires this ; but there is not a particle of atonement in the matter—none of His people ever think of expiation of sin being thus made.

In these three conclusions we believe both parties agree, and it will be our wisdom and for our comfort that we rest in them, not seeking to be wise above what is written. At the same time no fair, honest, and modest attempt to elucidate the truth of God is to be despised, if men would only be modest on the one hand in affirming, and meek on the other in denying. It is very remarkable how a very little more precision in the use of language in the Word of God would have prevented or settled almost every question which has arisen between the true followers of Jesus Christ—questions foreseen by God, and to Him easy of solution—questions which a very few words more or less would have prevented or immediately settled ; but these words have for wise reasons not been uttered by Him through whose inspiration all Scripture was given. No doubt the reticence of Scripture forms part of the discipline, by means of which the many sons are being prepared for the Father's house, amid the many mansions of which Christ is preparing for them the place which He purchased for them by His blood. Meanwhile, they walk by faith, yet the day of sight is approaching rapidly ; but in communica-

tions between the infinite God and created minds there cannot but be mystery ; till the finite becomes capable of comprehending the infinite, by becoming infinite itself, there must be mystery ; and while in heaven the enlarged and enlarging sphere of knowledge will make much plain that is mystery here, the enlarging circle of knowledge will disclose enlarged boundaries for the exercise of the utmost powers of the created mind. More knowledge indeed, far more knowledge will be possessed, but together with an undiminishing conviction that *none* can by searching find out God.

We pursue the question of the extent of the Atonement no farther. We know that it extends to all who believe, while we as assuredly know that salvation never can become the portion of those who do not believe. This settles the duty of every man to whom the word of this salvation is come ; the urgent question is not what shall this man do, or what shall that, but what I myself must do that I may be saved ? and thanks be to God the answer is clear and precise, " Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." That is God's way of life, and the fool need not err therein. It is only when men pit their own wisdom against that of God that they walk in darkness, not knowing whether they go, while the man who is willing to be taught of God goes from strength to strength, and his path is ever brightening till he walks amid the unclouded light of the perfect day.

But the very idea of atonement by a substitute has been objected to on the ground, that it is contradictory of God's justice, and therefore unbecoming God's character, that the innocent should in any case suffer

in the room of the guilty. We are well aware that it would be no answer to this objection to say that we see the innocent suffering along with the guilty every day; the licentious parent bringing disease, and the intemperate parent bringing penury and suffering upon his children; for in these cases the children are only comparatively innocent—innocent they are as respects the parents, who are the immediate instruments of the suffering, but not as respects God, by whose providence it is permitted: so that it is not substitutionary suffering, nor yet the suffering of perfect innocence. Let us say that we do not believe God ever did, or ever will place the innocent in the room of the guilty, and lay the punishment of the guilty on the back of the innocent without the most full and absolute concurrence of the innocent one. We say advisedly the innocent one, for we have not the slightest reason to believe that there ever was but one such instance; the instance recorded in the Scriptures, wherein God made to meet on Christ the iniquity of us all. It is easy for men to bewilder themselves in the consideration of abstract questions, but if the abstract question can be brought face to face with the Word of God, or with the dealings of God as illustrated and explained by His Word, immediately there arises light enough in the darkness if not to dispel all mystery, yet at least to justify the ways of God to men. This is eminently the case in relation to the Atonement made by Christ, the Holy One and the Just dying in the room of the unjust many. Eliphaz the Temanite was not far from the truth when he said, "Remember, I pray thee, who

ever perished being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?" Had he made but one exception, he would have been right altogether.

In regard to the substitution of the innocent in the room of the guilty, we acknowledge it to be essential that he be a voluntary substitute, it is essential to the justice of God, and therefore essential to the efficacy of atonement. God's justice against the offender could never be appeased by the suffering of an innocent but reluctant substitute—the substitution must be voluntary, or else there is an increase of offence rather than the taking of it away—that the righteous should be as the wicked that be far from God; and therefore if ever the righteous stood in the room of the wicked, it must have been by voluntary substitution, in order that the justice of God may stand clear, and that every mouth may be stopped that would arraign it. This essential qualification of voluntariness on the part of the substitute exists in perfection in respect of the atonement offered by the Lord Jesus Christ for the sin of His people. "I delight to do Thy will, O my God, yea, Thy law is within my heart;" "The cup which My heavenly Father hath given Me to drink, shall I not drink it." There is an infinite distance betwixt Christ's voluntary substitution of Himself in the room of the guilty, and that of any possible or conceivable substitution of creature for creature, whether of one less guilty, for another more guilty, or of a comparatively innocent for a guilty creature, in the ordinary and temporary administration of God's providential government on earth. We cannot conceive the possibility of a creature who knows

anything of the holiness of God and of His necessary abhorrence of sin, and who can therefore conceive something of the terror of the Lord, *offering* himself to bear, not the semblance but the real desert of sin in the wrath of God due to it, which would assuredly issue in the creature's destruction—were such a substitution possible (as we know it is not). We cannot for a moment entertain the idea of its being voluntary—only One who could bear the wrath and yet survive it is capable of such an illustrious display of pure, generous and disinterested love. Such an one was Christ, and such was His love. His glory and the Father's glory were one, and both would have remained as untarnished by the destruction of sinners of mankind, as they are by that of angel transgressors.

It is true that there was a joy set before Him after He should have made His soul an offering for sin, and for this joy He endured the cross, despising the shame; but it was the human nature that was thus exalted—the Divine being incapable of exaltation. And was it not congruous to the Divine justice and honour, and at the same time to all the finest feelings of created natures, that such should be the final issue of His humiliation unto death? Does it detract from the disinterested nature of His interposition? His essential glory could gain nothing by it, though no doubt the declarative glory of the triune Jehovah was thereby greatly manifested. But what was the satisfaction set peculiarly before Him as the Son of Man? When, Himself made perfect by suffering, He was to bring many sons unto glory, and be the first-

born among many brethren. A service more disinterested, or a purer joy it is impossible to conceive.

The essential glory of God is wholly unaffected by His dealings with His creatures, or by the result of these dealings, whether they be of mercy or of judgment, because they are all of essential righteousness. But His declarative glory may be, and is largely affected by these dealings, for it is in and through them that God next after His Word maketh Himself known to His intelligent creation. His dispensation of grace in Christ is that dealing of His with the race of men by which He hath specially designed to manifest Himself, and to show forth His glory, assuredly to the children of men at least; but we think there is reason to go further and say that it is the crowning dispensation by which all His glorious attributes are seen to be harmonised, not only by men on earth and by angels in heaven, but by all the countless hosts of His intelligent creation throughout all worlds. For the intimations though few are not obscure, by which we learn in the Word that principalities and powers in heavenly places are instructed in the manifold wisdom of God by the history of the Church of God on earth. And if it be so in regard to the occupants of the heavenly places, how much more may we conceive it to be so with all of the more outlying portions of the inconceivably wide dominion of God? Thus far at least we have ground on which to tread which feels under us to be solid as the immoveable rock: the greatest event in the eternity past, we feel very confident, that we do most assuredly know. And while it would be presump-

tion which we shall not incur, to say that that event is the greatest which even an eternity to come shall reveal; yet thus far we may go, without attempting to be wise above what is written, that the great event of God manifest in flesh is declared by the Holy Spirit to embody the manifold wisdom of God; and very possibly at the least, if not very probably, all the evolutions of the wisdom of God in the illimitable future, whether in kingdoms of providence, of grace, or of glory, may revolve around the Sun of Righteousness, which has arisen upon us with healing in His wings. What grander event, what greater mystery is it possible to conceive of as likely in the future to change the times and the seasons in the wide government of God? That eternal future must contain marvellous revelations of the power and wisdom and goodness of God; but they may all emanate from that great centre of wisdom and grace which was revealed when God was made manifest in flesh—in the likeness of sinful flesh—while yet holy, harmless, and undefiled, and separate from sinners.

There can be no greater presumption than for a creature of yesterday, and of faculties so limited as are those of man, to pronounce dogmatically upon what God should or should not do in certain conceivable hypothetical circumstances, except the presumption which arraigns what God has actually done, on the ground that it does not commend itself to human wisdom. But even both of these instances of human folly and presumption are of daily occurrence. Inasmuch is this the case that a Divine Atonement, that is an atonement in which the Divine unites with the

human, in order that the efficacy which could never result from the human alone, might carry with it an infinite sufficiency, bounded and restricted only by the will of God, is regarded by many as an outrage on human reason, even while there is a professed recognition of the Bible as in some sense or other, and to a greater or a less extent, the Word of God. That the Bible carries within itself its own witness that it was designed for the mass of mankind, as well as for the wise and prudent, few we presume will controvert, save perhaps the members of that idolatrous Church which has its foundation only in the ignorance of its deluded members; an ignorance based on the taking away of the key of knowledge by the sealing up of the Scriptures from these members, and which could not exist in the face of an open and perused Bible. This Bible, manifestly designed for all men, as all men are manifestly alike interested in it, must be in its essential features, level with the comprehension of all men, else its design in the purpose of God is frustrated. Words must mean in connection with revealed truth what they mean in connection with truth gathered from the works of God, in the exercise of that reason which, apart from revelation, is God's crowning gift to man; and if this be true, then it is true that atonement is God's way of bringing sinful and estranged man back to Himself in a way of peace and reconciliation, for the Scriptures from beginning to end are full of atonement.

Sacrifice for atonement is at the very least the basis of all the Old Testament worship both patriarchal and Mosaic. The *daily* morning and evening

sacrifice, the sacrifice on the great day of atonement, recurring once every year, together with the three great annual sacrificial feasts of the Lord, these together still further with the offerings for sins, special sins on the part of the priests, or of the congregation, or of the individual, familiarised the mind of the worshipper with the desert of sin in the sight of a holy God, and with atonement through blood as the only mean of reconciliation for the sinner. Sacrifice lies equally at the foundation of all acceptable New Testament worship—we have no access to God but by the new and living way which Christ hath opened for us by His own blood—for once in the end of the world He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. If the Old Testament sacrifices did not find their antitype and full accomplishment in Christ, then they were a mere shadow and nothing more; for if the substance was not Christ, where to look for a substance to justify the manifold wisdom of God we know not. Prophets pointed the hope of Israel forward to Christ as to come and fulfil the law; and apostles point the sin-laden, sin-convicted sinner backward to the death which Christ accomplished at Jerusalem as the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. Thus, let Scripture be read as the spirit of God revealed it, be understood and received in the fair and honest and unequivocal meaning of its language, and it is felt to be a message worthy of God to send and of infinite importance for man to receive; and at the same time consistent with itself from the first sacrifice in Eden, when the Lord God made coats of skin and clothed His naked crea-

tures, to the great sacrifice of Calvary, which harmonised all and consummated all.

There is room for almost no doubt as to the Divine origin of sacrifice, it is true that when revealed it is homogeneous with the dictates of conscience on the subject of the desert of sin, and yet it does not appear to be a natural dictate of conscience, that is, a thing which would naturally suggest itself to conscience as an appropriate substitute for the personal suffering of the transgressor. For that which the sacrifice of Christ clearly established, namely, that creature blood could never take away sin, must often have suggested itself to the devout Old Testament worshipper, especially in seasons (and there are such seasons in the experience of almost all men, and certainly in the experience of all God's people) when the burden of sin lay upon the conscience with crushing weight as an evil beyond the reach of all creature power to cure: and the same truth was taught by the voices of the prophets. Indeed, testimony to Christ was from the very beginning the very spirit and essence of prophecy. From the first Divine prediction in Eden, uttered by the voice of God Himself, through Moses and Samuel and all that followed after till the immediate forerunner of our Lord appeared, there was a constant reference to the seed of the woman, more or less clearly revealing Him as "Jehovah our righteousness," and more or less clearly disclosing that His soul should be made an offering for sin. The long looked for hope of Israel came at last, and the Sun of Righteousness arose upon the world with healing in His wings, and the way, the truth, and the life were

fully revealed. The second coming is the hope and expectation of the Church now; but "Be patient, brethren, stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." "Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus!"

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Table 1. Mean (SD) age, height, weight, and body mass index (BMI) of the 100 children in the study

Measure	Mean (SD)
Age (years)	10.2 (0.5)
Height (cm)	145.2 (10.1)
Weight (kg)	38.5 (10.2)
BMI (kg m ⁻²)	18.6 (3.2)

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children were asked to perform a series of tasks designed to assess their ability to perform a range of physical activities.

The first task was a 100 m sprint. The children were asked to run as fast as they could for 100 m. The time taken to complete the sprint was recorded.

The second task was a 100 m shuttle run. The children were asked to run back and forth between two lines 50 m apart for 100 m. The time taken to complete the shuttle run was recorded.

The third task was a 100 m obstacle course. The children were asked to run a 100 m course that included a series of obstacles. The time taken to complete the obstacle course was recorded.

The fourth task was a 100 m relay race. The children were asked to run a 100 m relay race in which they had to pass a baton to a partner. The time taken to complete the relay race was recorded.

The fifth task was a 100 m team relay. The children were asked to run a 100 m team relay in which they had to pass a baton to a partner. The time taken to complete the team relay was recorded.

The sixth task was a 100 m team relay. The children were asked to run a 100 m team relay in which they had to pass a baton to a partner. The time taken to complete the team relay was recorded.

The seventh task was a 100 m team relay. The children were asked to run a 100 m team relay in which they had to pass a baton to a partner. The time taken to complete the team relay was recorded.

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The ninth task was a 100 m team relay. The children were asked to run a 100 m team relay in which they had to pass a baton to a partner. The time taken to complete the team relay was recorded.

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The eleventh task was a 100 m team relay. The children were asked to run a 100 m team relay in which they had to pass a baton to a partner. The time taken to complete the team relay was recorded.

The twelfth task was a 100 m team relay. The children were asked to run a 100 m team relay in which they had to pass a baton to a partner. The time taken to complete the team relay was recorded.

The thirteenth task was a 100 m team relay. The children were asked to run a 100 m team relay in which they had to pass a baton to a partner. The time taken to complete the team relay was recorded.

The fourteenth task was a 100 m team relay. The children were asked to run a 100 m team relay in which they had to pass a baton to a partner. The time taken to complete the team relay was recorded.

The fifteenth task was a 100 m team relay. The children were asked to run a 100 m team relay in which they had to pass a baton to a partner. The time taken to complete the team relay was recorded.